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NEW

classic gaming

The ultimate guide to retro videogaming

Digital Edition

FUTURE

SIXTH EDITION

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PRESENTS

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

classic gaming

WELCOME

Videogames have a rich and varied history – from the very first arcade cabs of the 70s to the 16-bit classics of the 90s, they have helped shape the early years (and beyond) of many of our lives.

We can all remember entering the magical world of our local amusement arcade for the first time to be greeted by the fantastic sights and sounds on offer, or that feeling of unboxing our first home computer or console on a freezing Christmas morning. And, whether you're a child of the 70s, 80s or 90s, you'll have a special place in your heart reserved for all of the weird and wonderful games that have delivered such joy, pain, despair and frustration into your life over the years.

So why not join us as we take a trip down memory lane to explore just a few of the most iconic, memorable and influential games ever made. We discover what made the likes of *Final Fantasy*, *Donkey Kong* and *Resident Evil* such legendary franchises in our ultimate guides, revisit some of the best bosses in gaming history, and take a look back at the groundbreaking games that changed everything, while key industry figures come clean about the classic games they love most and why.

We hope you enjoy this look into gaming's glorious past.

FUTURE

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Printed by William Gibbons, 26 Planetary Road,
Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

Classic Gaming Sixth Edition
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Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

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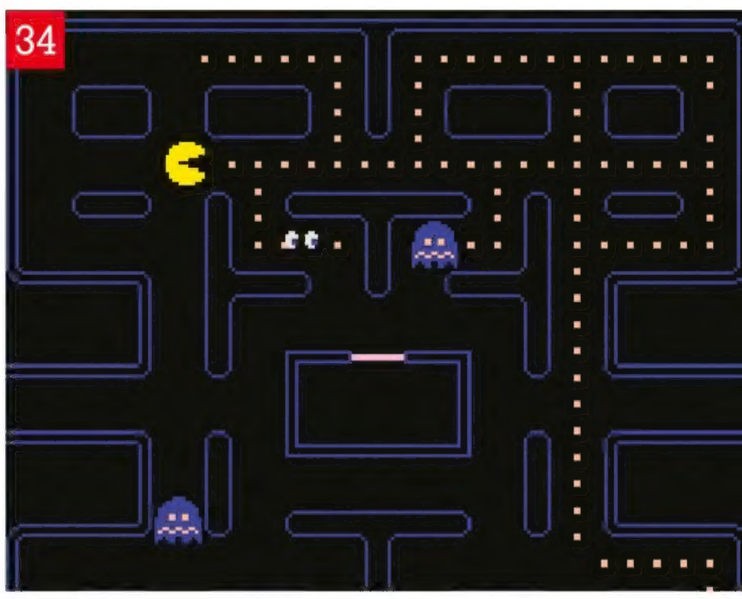

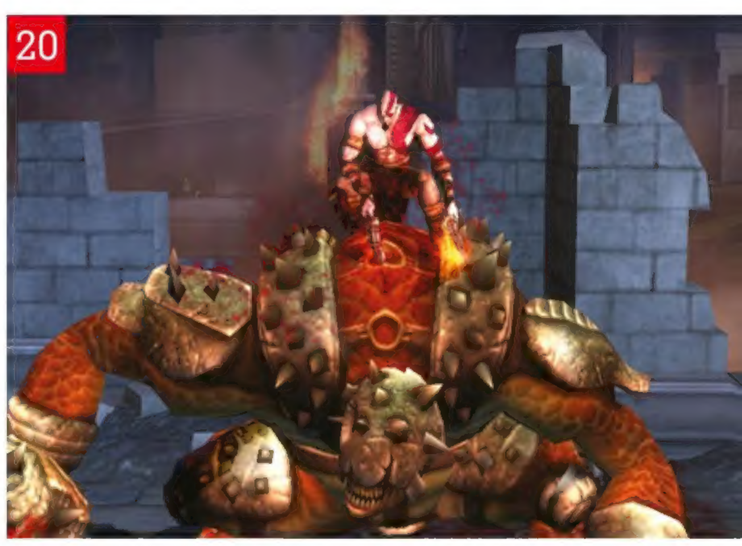

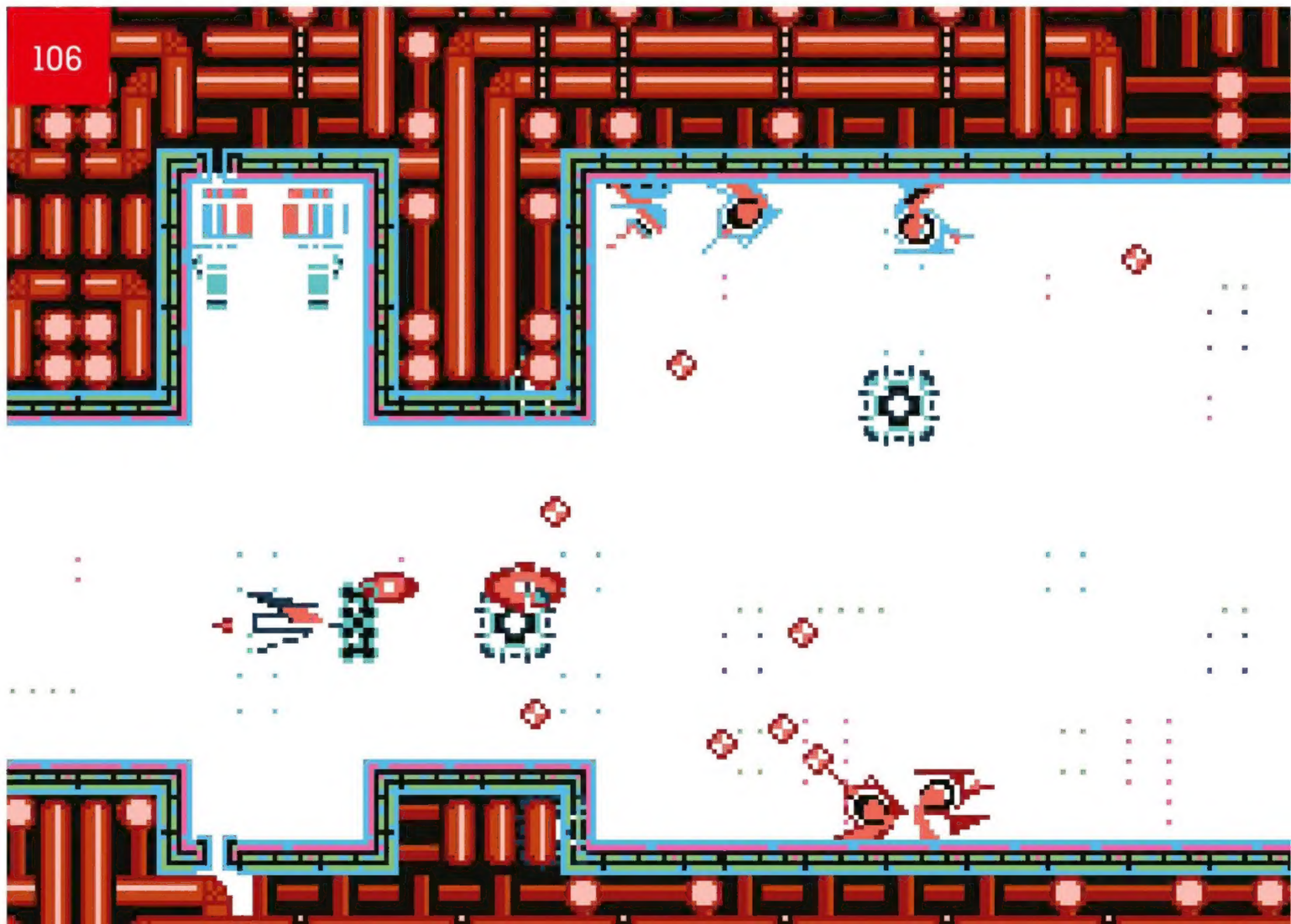

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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...

FINAL FANTASY

The leading name in Japanese RPGs, Final Fantasy has enjoyed a rich and varied run, spanning three decades, and serving up some genuine all-time classics along the way

IT'S AMAZING TO think that one final act of desperation on behalf of a developer losing faith in gaming as a medium managed to spawn one of the longest-running franchises, but that's exactly what happened. Today, *Final Fantasy* is the biggest franchise in the JRPG arena and one of Japan's most successful ever gaming exports, enjoying a level of success that few other series can boast. 2016's *Final Fantasy XV* might suggest that there were only 15 games in the series, but the actual number – as you're about to discover – is significantly greater. Hop on your chocobo and let's get this epic quest underway...

FINAL FANTASY 1987

SYSTEM: NES

Squaresoft's Hironobu Sakaguchi had long been petitioning his bosses to let him make an RPG, but it wasn't until Enix saw success with *Dragon Quest* in 1986 that Squaresoft finally saw that there was indeed a market for console RPGs and green-lit the project. While it shared a lot tonally and in terms of setting with *Dragon Quest*, Western influences from the likes of *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Wizardry* offered deeper character progression and combat elements that would go on to become staples of the franchise, as well as introducing many to the outstanding scoring of Nobuo Uematsu. The game's title reflected not only Squaresoft's financial instability at the time but also Sakaguchi's own sentiments – had the game flopped, he reportedly planned to leave gaming altogether. While its failure could have taken its parent company down with it, the game's initial print run of 200,000 copies had to be doubled to meet demand. It has since been re-released no less than 17 times across various platforms, finally arriving in Europe for the first time in 2003 on PSone.

FINAL FANTASY II 1988

SYSTEM: NES

After the unexpected success of the original game, Sakaguchi and his team were tasked with turning around a speedy sequel in order to fully capitalise on its popularity. Despite arriving within a year of the first game's release, *FFII* still managed to take some bold strides forward – battle scenes were no longer so heavily windowed and felt more dynamic as a result, while franchise staples such as chocobo mounts and recurring character Cid also made their debut here. Since the US release of the original was something of a flop commercially, this sequel would not be localised for the first time until 2003, for PlayStation compilation *Final Fantasy Origins*.

FINAL FANTASY III 1990

SYSTEM: NES

Clearly onto a winner in Japan, Square continued to churn out sequels but again, this was far more than a simple cash grab. *FFIII* further refined the series' battle system, doing away with damage details as captions and instead working them into the visual representation of the fight, in turn allowing more space for the improved combat graphics to shine. The original's job system was greatly improved by allowing all playable characters to switch between multiple roles unlocked as the game progressed, lending players a degree of customisation and personalisation they had not enjoyed up to this point. It was also the first game to feature summons. Once again, though, no localisation was available until long after release – in this case, it took until the 2006 DS remake for an official non-Japanese version to be launched.

FINAL FANTASY IV 1991

SYSTEM: SNES

Here's where it starts to get a little complicated. With only the original game having been available in the US, this SNES debut instead released as *Final Fantasy II* so as to avoid confusion. Working with new hardware proved to be a double-edged sword for the team – the overly ambitious script came in at around four times too long for what the capacity of the cartridge would allow, although the improved fidelity would allow character emotions to be conveyed visually to a degree and it was largely cut without omitting any intended story beats. *FFIV* marks the shift from simple turn-based combat to the series' trademark Active Time Battle system, although its implementation is basic in comparison to subsequent titles. The job system was simplified once again to lock characters into a single role, but these roles were better defined thanks to the addition of class-specific abilities and commands. Mode-7 effects were employed for the first time to make airship travel and spell effects even more impressive.

FINAL FANTASY V 1992

SYSTEM: SNES

The job system flip-flop continues as fixed classes are done away with once again to make room for the most complex and intricate version of the system seen to date. That's largely why the game didn't get to leave Japan too, mind – it was seen as being far too hardcore for the Western market and at least three known attempts to localise it under different names all fell through. It's such a shame, since the awesome job system and refined ATB mechanics (progress bars were added to show who would be acting next) have since led to this being a series favourite for many the world over.

FFV WAS SEEN AS BEING TOO HARDCORE FOR THE WESTERN MARKET – THREE KNOWN ATTEMPTS TO LOCALISE IT FELL THROUGH

FINAL FANTASY MYSTIC QUEST 1993

SYSTEM: SNES

The first spin-offs came a few years previous on Game Boy, but this was the earliest one released on a home console. Almost the antithesis of *FFV*, it's a hybrid of *Zelda*-esque action RPG elements and a simple turn-based combat system where you never have control of more than two characters. In fact, you only actually have one by default – the game takes control of partner characters unless you switch to manual override. An entry-level JRPG and not a true *Final Fantasy* title, but still fairly entertaining.

FINAL FANTASY VI 1994

SYSTEM: SNES

Vastly improved visuals and a simpler character development system meant that this would not be denied a US visa as its forerunner so rudely was, but that only caused more confusion – *VI* was actually released in the US as *Final Fantasy III* to maintain numbering traditions. It's here that we first see a lot of the complexities that later become commonplace in the series, such as events where several parties must be formed and used separately, and choice as to the order in which certain scenarios play out. Widely regarded as the best game in the series, *FFVI* is unquestionably as good as 16-bit RPGs get so if you haven't played it, get on that – mechanically, it holds up brilliantly even by today's genre standards, the sprite-based visuals are timeless and Uematsu's score is simply god-tier.

FINAL FANTASY VII 1997

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

The leap from 16-bit to 32-bit hardware was one of the greatest the industry had ever seen and few franchises had a greater degree of ambition and potential to truly come of age here than *Final Fantasy* – sprawling epics like *V* and *VI* came in at under 4MB a pop, whereas *VII* would span three 700MB CDs. Characters made the jump from sprites to full 3D models, while backdrops were pre-rendered CG as was popular in games at the time to help them punch above their weight visually. The first *FF* to reach Europe is respected for other reasons, too; its setting, characters, themes, narrative and score are all benchmarks that modern RPGs have struggled to match for years and the ingenious Materia system offered all the depth of *FFV*'s job system and more for those who wanted it, while at the same time being simple enough on a base level to allow anyone to bluff their way through with enough old-school grinding. FMV sequences gave us a truly cinematic way to understand and engage with these characters, which is a huge part of what makes this the *FF* many swear by to this day.

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS 1997

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

Trading the traditional RPG action for another 16-bit staple, *Tactics* laid on 3D grid-based arenas in which to do battle in line with strategy RPGs such as *Tactics Ogre*, *Fire Emblem* and *Super Robot Wars* that had proven popular in Japan. In fact, a large chunk of the *Tactics Ogre* team actually worked on *FFT*, making it easy to see where similarities came from. Still, the in-depth job system and interesting twist on the main series' ATB mechanic lent this its own personality, leading to a number of indirect sequels. The game's world, Ivalice, would also go on to be the setting for *FFXII*.

FINAL FANTASY VIII 1999

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

FFVII was the series' first step towards realistic visuals but *VIII* took that a step further. The result is a game that feels less stylised and as a result arguably doesn't hold up as well today, but it's still a popular pick in 'Best *FF*' polls. It's perhaps the first truly divisive game in the series, however – many couldn't get on with the unique Draw/Junction system for earning spells and upgrading characters, nor with the diversion from more traditional fantasy themes seen in older games. Whatever your take on the game itself, though, the Triple Triad card game still remains the best mini-game to ever have featured in the franchise. The infectious music (and impending threat of the Random rule spreading) still haunt us to this day.

FINAL FANTASY IX 2000

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

Sakaguchi's final entry as producer couldn't carry his unique style and approach any more proudly – it's little wonder he has been known to cite this as his favourite *FF*. A return to classic fantasy, this also saw the series go back to designated roles for each character rather than having a Materia or Junction-style system that opened up options for players. It's a little simpler as a result and while we'd suggest that this makes it the weakest of the PlayStation trio, there are plenty of fans who would like to Ultima us right in the face for suggesting such. So yeah, try it for yourself – the stylised looks help it hold up better today than *FFVIII* from a graphical standpoint, at least.

SAGA OF MANA

The unexpected success of the NES original in Japan and the sudden uptake of the Game Boy led Square to quickly turn its attention to the system and while the original plan was to create an RPG for the handheld (it didn't have any at the time), this would lead to the first handheld *Final Fantasy* game thanks to a name change for the Western market. *Makai Toushi Sa-Ga*, despite its localised name would kickstart the *SaGa* RPG series, while *Final Fantasy Adventure* (*Mystic Quest* in Europe), arriving once again on Game Boy only a year later, planted the seeds for the Mana series. With only one overseas success in RPGs at the time, Square elected to slap *Final Fantasy* labels on *everything*. *Legend* got two sequels, again carrying the *FF* brand (*SaGa* as a franchise never really took off outside of Japan), while the more action-based combat of *Adventure* would find a new home on SNES via follow-up and all-time favourite *Secret Of Mana*.

FINAL FANTASY X 2001

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2

Another generation leap brought with it huge potential for change and, once again, Square embraced the challenge. Results, it must be said, were somewhat mixed though the game itself is strong enough to carry it regardless. Full 3D environments replaced the rendered backgrounds of old, while characters were far more detailed on the new console than ever before. Both FMV sequences and audio quality also saw improvements, although the switch to fully voiced dialogue was both too much for many that loved imagining classic RPG character voices as they would the faces of characters in books and also a weak link in general – one scene in particular is laughably bad (pun very much intended), but the general budget anime dub feel of the rest still jars somewhat with the otherwise stellar production values. Also, Blitzball. So much Blitzball...

FINAL FANTASY XI ONLINE 2002

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Having seen the popularity of Western MMOs at the time, Square was keen to deliver its own alternative and had just the brand with which to do it. While having a main series title deviate so radically from the solo JRPG template upon which its storied legacy was built, one of the main things fans came to love about the game was how much lore from and love for previous *FF* titles was evident. *XI* boasts many firsts – first 'proper' console MMO, first cross-play MMO, first Xbox 360 MMO and first online *Final Fantasy*, to name but a few – but the one Square will be most interested in wasn't announced until 2012, when it was revealed that *FFXI* is the most profitable game in the entire series. Yeah, a decade of recurring subscriptions and an addictive gameplay model will do that...

FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES 2003

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE

Given that Nintendo's pint-sized console didn't have the online clout for an MMO or the storage capacity for a full-on epic RPG, Square had to get a little creative. This four-player spin-off relies on far more action-heavy combat than main series games had previously, while also offering some ingenious new features to make multiplayer the best way to play – by charging attacks or spells with the right timing, you could combine multiple attacks into a single far more powerful blow, making coordination among players crucial to success.

FINAL FANTASY X-2 2003

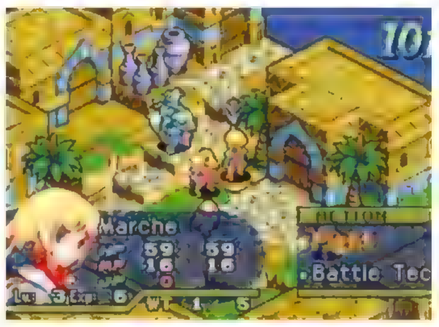
SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2

The game that started a dangerous trend for Square. We can't say that we particularly wanted a direct sequel to *FFX* but even if we had, we're not sure this strange playable *Charlie's Angels* anime would have been entirely what we were after. Odd though it may be, the Dress Sphere system (for switching jobs by changing outfits, naturally) works well enough and the monster training/battling mechanics, while hardly *Pokémon*, are also fit for purpose. It's just a shame *that* intro put so many people off what is actually a decent, if unremarkable, *Final Fantasy* spin-off.

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE 2003

SYSTEM: GAME BOY ADVANCE

What a smart play this was. Spotting that the GBA was the first handheld powerful enough to run and display a modern SRPG and that the *Tactics* formula was a perfect fit for handhelds, Square served up a near-endless strategic delight. Judges invoke Laws, which change the way each battle must be played, making it impossible to rely on the same handful of overpowered characters or abilities in all circumstances – it's all about thinking on the fly, which is precisely what you want from a tactics game.



FINAL FANTASY XII 2006

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2

You can tell just from playing it that *XII* is a game created by a team with MMO experience – to all intents and purposes, this is a single-player MMO in much of its approach, design and combat. The Gambit system grows in strength as the game goes on, starting out as a way to have struggling characters quaff Potions in a pinch but ultimately developing into a system of such complexity that you can pretty much code your party to act independently and rarely even require your input. Many design decisions showcase a time where developers were trying their best to prevent trade-ins while retailers looked to upsell with guides and such – in one of the rudest RPG missables of all time, Vaan's ultimate weapon can only be obtained if you leave a handful of select chests around the world unopened, something that probably wouldn't have been discovered to this day if it weren't for the official strategy guide. Japan got a greatly enhanced version of the game in the form of the International Zodiac Job System version, which we'd love to see localised in HD form as the team has done with the updated versions of *X-2* and the *Kingdom Hearts* games.

DIRGE OF CERBERUS: FINAL FANTASY VII 2006

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION 2

The less said about this the better, so we'll keep this brief. Missing the point of both newly appointed lead character Vincent Valentine and *VII* itself, this turgid shooter made it abundantly clear that the old adage is indeed true – you can't please all the people all the time. Series fans were let down by janky gameplay with only loose ties to *FF* canon while shooter fans were left raising their eyebrows at the wildly convoluted narrative and bizarre structure. Nobody had a nice time, basically.

CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII 2006

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

A far more fitting tribute to the *FFVII* legacy than *Dirge Of Cerberus*, this PSP action-RPG does a great job of fleshing out the back-story of the PSone classic. With Zack stepping into the starring role, you're able to experience first hand what it's like to actually be a SOLDIER badass, which proved to be enough of a hook to keep us playing. It certainly didn't hurt that it was one of the best-looking games on PSP, and strong sales reflected both that and its core quality.

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS A2: GRIMOIRE OF THE RIFT 2007

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

It worked well enough on GBA, so why not do it all over again on DS? While still solid, *A2* was faced with stiff competition on the immensely popular Nintendo handheld, the likes of *Disgaea*, *Front Mission* and *Advance Wars* already staking their claim on the system around the time the *FF* sequel rocked onto the scene. Iteration rather than innovation is core here – it's basically the same great strategy game, only with a few tweaks.

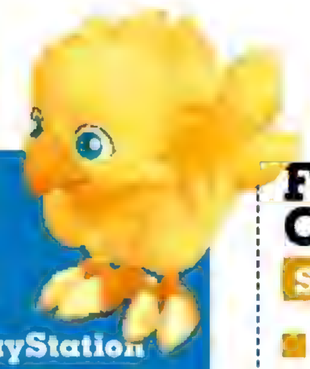
FINAL FANTASY XII: REVENANT WINGS 2007

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

In a world where sequels to mainline *Final Fantasy* games were considered okay, a follow-up to hugely successful PS2 swansong *XII* was always on the cards. Few could have predicted the form it would take, though – this curious RTS neither looks nor feels like the game it supposedly follows on from, although summoning armies of Espers proved pretty neat even when taken in isolation.

ANOTHER GENERATION LEAP BROUGHT WITH IT HUGE POTENTIAL AND, ONCE AGAIN, SQUARE EMBRACED THE CHALLENGE

KWEH AS FOLK



It didn't take long after their introduction for chocobos to go from supporting characters to starring roles, with the global success of *Final Fantasy VII* kicking off a wave of bird-based spin-offs. The *Fushigi no Dungeon* series started off as a *Dragon Quest* spin-off, so it's somewhat fitting that Square should send its own RPG brand to copy Enix's once more. But *Chocobo's Mysterious Dungeon* was just the start – PlayStation owners had dungeoneering sequels, bizarre kart racers and even PocketStation mini-games before the chocobos went off to graze in new pastures like the WonderSwan, mobiles and later the DS and Wii. There have now been almost 20 *Chocobo* games spanning all number of genres – here's how it all played out for the unlikely critter heroes. Kweh!

CHOCOBO'S MYSTERIOUS DUNGEON
YEAR: 1997 SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

CHOCOBO'S DUNGEON 2
YEAR: 1999 SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

CHOCOBO RACING
YEAR: 1999 SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

CHOCOBO COLLECTION
YEAR: 1999 SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION

CHOCOBO ON THE JOB
YEAR: 2000 SYSTEM: WONDERSWAN

CHOCOBO ANYWHERE
YEAR: 2002 SYSTEM: MOBILE

CHOCOBO LAND: A GAME OF DICE
YEAR: 2002 SYSTEM: GAME BOY ADVANCE

CHOCOBO ANYWHERE 2: ESCAPE! GHOST SHIP
YEAR: 2003 SYSTEM: MOBILE

CHOCO-MATE
YEAR: 2003 SYSTEM: MOBILE

CHOCOBO ANYWHERE 2.5: INFILTRATE! ANCIENT RUINS
YEAR: 2004 SYSTEM: MOBILE

CHOCOBO ANYWHERE 3: DEFEAT! THE GREAT RAINBOW-COLORED DEMON
YEAR: 2004 SYSTEM: MOBILE

CHOCOBO DE MOBILE
YEAR: 2006 SYSTEM: MOBILE

FINAL FANTASY FABLES: CHOCOBO TALES
YEAR: 2006 SYSTEM: DS

FINAL FANTASY FABLES: CHOCOBO'S DUNGEON
YEAR: 2007 SYSTEM: WII

CID AND CHOCOBO'S MYSTERIOUS DUNGEON
YEAR: 2008 SYSTEM: DS

CHOCOBO AND THE MAGIC PICTURE BOOK
YEAR: 2008 SYSTEM: DS

CHOCOBO PANIC
YEAR: 2010 SYSTEM: IOS

CHOCOBO'S CRYSTAL TOWER
YEAR: 2010 SYSTEM: MOBILE

CHOCOBO'S CHOCOTTO FARM
YEAR: 2012 SYSTEM: IOS

FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: RING OF FATES 2007

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

A handheld prequel to the GameCube title, *Ring Of Fates* shares much with the game it so clearly emulates. Played alone, it lacks a lot of the depth of the original but it won some respect back by extending the multiplayer component across oceans via Wi-Fi play. Sadly, with Nintendo shutting down online support for original DS games, you'll need to find a group of other owners to play locally to enjoy that side of the game today.

FINAL FANTASY IV: THE AFTER YEARS 2008

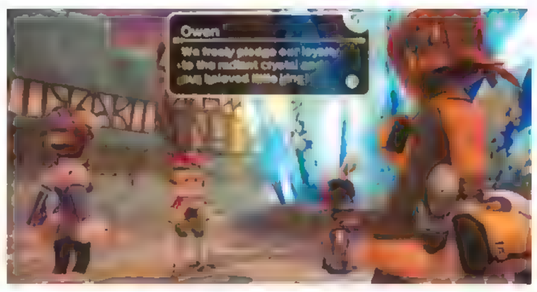
SYSTEM: VARIOUS

The sequels keep on coming, although it's clear that less effort went into this strange episodic effort than into many of the others. Assets are largely reused from the various remakes of the SNES game and despite a few interesting new mechanics (such as a lunar cycle that affects combat), it's still an extra chapter to a book many would be happy to simply leave closed or read fresh.

DISSIDIA FINAL FANTASY 2008

SYSTEM: PSP

What if all of the most famous characters in *Final Fantasy* history were to get together for some arbitrary reason and have a big fight? That's the question posed and, to a lesser degree, answered by *Dissidia*, a curious mix of arcade brawling and RPG mechanics. It looks great and plays well enough, but it's best seen as entertaining fan service – it's basically *Final Fantasy*'s answer to *Smash Bros.*, and you likely already know if you'd enjoy that or not.



FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: MY LIFE AS A KING 2008

SYSTEM: WII

A download-only title that does away with the idea of being a hero in favour of placing players on the throne and getting others to do the dirty work for them. It's slow-paced but it sort of works, if only as a way of seeing quests from a different point of view. Interestingly, it wasn't planned as an *FF* game at all – *Crystal Chronicles*' engine was apparently used to prototype the game and it eventually picked up the title as well.

FINAL FANTASY XIII 2009

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Or, 'The moment it became cool to hate *Final Fantasy*'. There's a lot wrong with *XIII*, make no mistake about it – the cast is among the weakest in core series history, the pacing is poor and complaints about its linearity are not misplaced. But where many other JRPGs attempt to disguise their linear structure, you have to sort of respect Square's decision to have *XIII* wear it on its sleeve. If anything, it makes the big third act reveal of the huge Gran Pulse area all the more impressive, plus the Paradigm battle system (a strange hybrid of custom job systems and fixed character roles, with line-ups that can be changed on the fly) is certainly more involved than many similar menu-driven efforts. We'd have a far easier job trying to defend it if it didn't end with a Leona Lewis song, though...

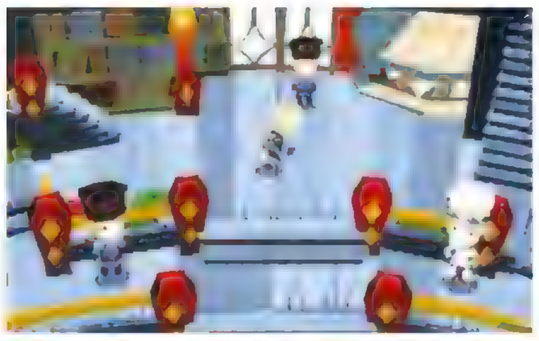
FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: ECHOES OF TIME 2009

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

It wasn't broken, and it didn't get fixed. *Echoes Of Time* offered more of the same for *Crystal Chronicles* fans, this time allowing cross-platform play locally between the Wii and DS versions. Still not really worth the effort for solo players to pour hours into, but multiplayer proved once again to be an amusing distraction and another great proof of the ways in which the *Final Fantasy* series could break into new realms of gameplay without losing its core values and charm.

FINAL FANTASY: THE 4 HEROES OF LIGHT 2009

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

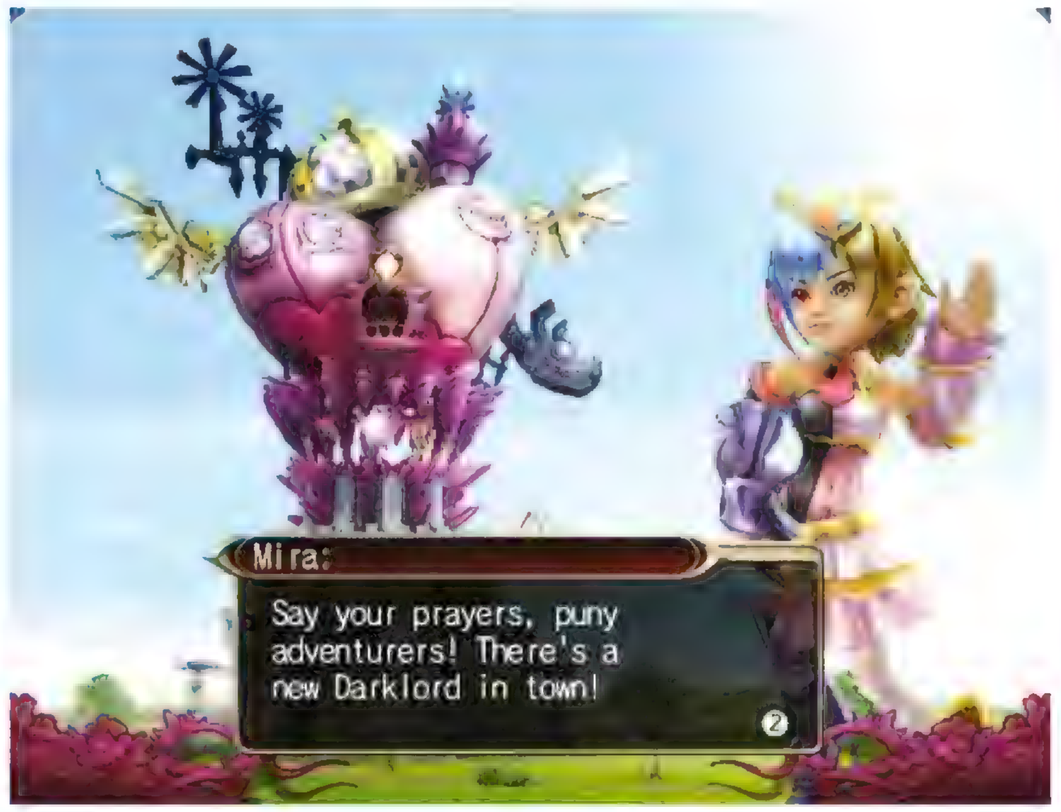


While *XIII* showed a Square desperately trying new things to keep the JRPG afloat, this DS release instead saw the company fall back on what it knows so very well. As traditional a JRPG as you're likely to find in the 21st Century, this is perhaps most notable as the game that spawned the excellent *Bravely Default* as a non-branded follow-up.

FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: MY LIFE AS A DARKLORD 2009

SYSTEM: WII

If *My Life As A King* was a stretch for fans with its city management gameplay, this tower defence title is some full-on Plastic Man nonsense. A simple yet effective rock/paper/scissors system determines the effectiveness of each trap or monster on a given unit and the side-on viewpoint and vertical structure are welcome changes to the usual standards, but we're not sure to this day why this even has 'Final Fantasy' in its title.



FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: THE CRYSTAL BEARERS 2009

SYSTEM: WII

The nail in the *Crystal Chronicles* coffin, this multiplayer-only action title did away with not only the co-op gameplay that made its forerunners enjoyable but also with the levelling system and character progression you might expect from a decent RPG. If you thought *My Life As A Darklord* completely missed the point of the *Final Fantasy* series, you should check this title out. Only don't, because it isn't very good.

FINAL FANTASY XIV: ONLINE 2010

SYSTEM: PC

Another MMO was always on the cards after the insane success of *FFXI*, but the initial launch of *XIV* wasn't the second success story Square likely had in mind. No MMO ever has a particularly good launch but this was poor – console-style menu interfaces, patchy visuals and server issues led many to stick with *XI* instead. Square would need something drastic to fix this mess; its imminent updates did just that.

FINAL FANTASY XIII-2 2011

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Given the backlash to *FFXIII*, you have to wonder what Square was thinking in announcing a direct sequel to arguably the most hated game in the entire series. Still, *XIII-2* made almost too much progress from its linear progenitor – its entirely open-ended structure spanned both space and time to deliver the most confusing map screen and some of the most ludicrous time-hopping quests yet seen in the series. Monster recruiting and training, seeing the same locations in various time periods and the bizarre paradox endings rate among the highs, with characters once again disappointing.

FINAL FANTASY TYPE-0 2011

SYSTEM: PSP

Monster Hunter and its myriad clones cemented the PSP as the hardcore handheld of choice, so this action-leaning title proved to be right at home there. Despite being widely regarded as one of the best-looking PSP games and the best non-mainline *FF* titles in its native territory, the game would not be granted permission to leave Japan. Well, until the HD release in 2015, anyway...

DISSIDIA 012 FINAL FANTASY 2011

SYSTEM: PSP

Both *Dissidia* and the PSP enjoyed wild success in Japan, so this oddly-named sequel (that second word is 'Duodecim', apparently) was to be expected. More playable characters, more stages and more content all presented fans with a reason to upgrade and if you're new to *Dissidia*, you can just jump in right here for the best experience.

THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY 2012

SYSTEM: NINTENDO 3DS

If you adore the music of the *Final Fantasy* series, then congratulations on having ears that work. Uematsu's compositions and indeed some of his understudies' works are among the most recognisable in all of gaming, making a rhythm action game that uses them an exceptional idea. Dividing tunes into Field, Battle and Event stages, each with different mechanics, *Theatrhythm* was a superb title that has since been rendered basically redundant by *Curtain Call*.

UEMATSU'S COMPOSITIONS AND INDEED SOME OF HIS UNDERSTUDIES' WORKS ARE AMONG THE MOST RECOGNISABLE IN ALL OF GAMING

FINAL FANTASY XIV: A REALM REBORN 2013

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Developers, take note – *this* is how you fix a broken game. Changes across the board from GUI to basic gameplay made this reboot effectively a brand new game, and just in time for its PS3 launch too. Square would go on to refine it further still in time for a PS4 release that enjoys near parity with the PC version, with cross play supported across all three formats. With new content added almost every month, *A Realm Reborn* is destined to evolve yet more as the years roll on. We'd be surprised if this doesn't outgross *XI* at some point in the future...

LIGHTNING RETURNS: FINAL FANTASY XIII 2013

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

If you didn't want one sequel to *Final Fantasy XIII* then it seems unlikely that you'd have wanted *two*. An odd marriage of the Paradigm system from the core game and *X-2*'s Dress Sphere mechanic, this action-heavy twist on the usual combat made switching outfits at the right time the key to victory. With a goal of saving as many people as possible within a restrictive time limit, it's all about making the best possible use of your time and the combat is actually pretty damn tech – just watch some YouTube exhibition mode stuff and try to claim otherwise.

THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY: CURTAIN CALL 2014

SYSTEM: NINTENDO 3DS

Yet another update, but yet another welcome one. *Curtain Call* brings the total song count to over 200 (with yet more available as DLC, if that's still not enough), adds a host of new characters and refines the Chaos Note system of the original into the much tighter Quest Medley mode. Pretty much essential for fans.

FINAL FANTASY EXPLORERS 2014

SYSTEM: NINTENDO 3DS

Stop us if you've heard this one before... this is an action-RPG where four players can team up to slay monsters, earn loot, craft better gear and repeat that cycle until they have stumps for hands. Yes, it's a *Monster Hunter* clone, but we're not going to say no to a slice of *FF*-flavoured hunting. Released in Japan in 2014, it eventually made its way to North America and Europe in early 2016.

FINAL FANTASY TYPE-0 HD 2015

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

We've omitted most remakes and reissues on account of how little they changed, but this makes the cut purely due to its interesting circumstances. Despite no localisation of the PSP original (or indeed a Vita upgrade, as was rumoured for a time), a HD version of *Type-0* arrived on PS4 and Xbox One in 2015. Some cynics saw it as a vessel for the *FFXV* demo and nothing more, but we were more than happy for the chance to enjoy the unreleased game in English.

FINAL FANTASY XV 2016

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Originally announced as *Versus XIII* back in 2006, this incredible looking *FF* title finally hit our PS4 and Xbox One screens at the end of 2016. Arriving to positive reviews across the board, *XV* made good on its promise that it would be a game worth waiting for, offering exciting elements and fresh ideas for both veteran fans and series newcomers alike. With *FFXV*, Square created a platform from which even better can be expected in future and ensured that *Final Fantasy* was once again a giant within the RPG world.

WHY I ♥...

The Secret Of Monkey Island

JAMES GOLDING, LEAD ENGINE PROGRAMMER (UNREAL), EPIC

My favourite game ever is The Secret Of Monkey Island *– it's such a great mix of clever mechanics and intelligent design. It's funny, too, which a lot of games weren't back then. It wasn't ever trying to beat you, either, just entertain you. I think there's only one way to die throughout the whole game – it was about playing it, rather than it playing you. It felt like such a complete world, too, and few games have made such a compelling and complete fantasy world as that did. I will still find myself humming the music to myself, too, years later. Everything about it just invited you to come and play, and not a lot of games have that any more.*

"It felt like such a complete world, and few games have made such a compelling and complete fantasy world as Monkey Island did"

JAMES GOLDING, LEAD ENGINE PROGRAMMER (UNREAL), EPIC

BEHIND THE SCENES

GOD OF WAR

Who would you get behind? An orange marsupial, a hovering space car, or a furious half-naked demigod with chains grafted to his wrists? God Of War director David Jaffe reveals how Kratos was a really angry blessing for PlayStation 2...

July 2005
PlayStation 2
Sony
Sony Santa Monica
Shannon Studstill, producer
Tim Moss, lead programmer
Ken Feldman, lead artist

MASCOTS COME IN all shapes and sizes. If there were some perfect creation process, chances are the most successful gaming heroes of all time wouldn't be an out-of-shape plumber and a hedgehog that isn't even the right colour. No, there's no science to it all, hence why we probably shouldn't be all that surprised that Sony's unexpected mascot for the PS2 era came in the form of gaming's angriest man. The last great example of a platform holder giving one of its studios almost full creative control over a project could easily have gone so badly wrong, but the history books tell us otherwise – *God Of War* managed to make ancient history exciting for a whole new audience, just as *Clash Of The Titans* had done nearly 25 years earlier, with cutting edge technology once again at the forefront of bringing legends back to life and capturing the imaginations of a generation.

Strange to think, then, that *God Of War* might never have existed had one of the other options on the table at the time been given the green light first. Founding father of the franchise, game director and personable semi-automatic cuss rifle David Jaffe talks us through some of the other options and, with all due respect, it isn't hard to see why Kratos came out on top. "I was looking at a game – we were calling it *Dead Man* at the time – and it was an open-world first-person game," he reveals. "It wasn't exactly survival horror – it wasn't so slow-paced – but it was trying to do like an action-adventure set in the Louisiana swamps and bayou about voodoo and supernatural powers, so the character would have these abilities and powers. I liked the idea of doing an open-world, first-person game and there hadn't been a lot of those at the time." Given that *Shadow Man* never exactly took off to the degree Acclaim would have hoped and the technical limitations of PS2, we can't say we're entirely surprised to hear that *Dead Man* never got off the ground.

"Another one that didn't get as far came from us talking a lot about trying to create a way for gameplay to evoke the same kind of emotions as watching *Lupin III*, the one that Miyazaki did," Jaffe continues. "How could we make a game that puts you in that same kind of feeling of high adventure?" The spirit of this project seemed to make it into the final game, even if the original pitch never really got off the ground. Indeed, there was always a clear front-runner for some of the team, it would appear, and Jaffe confirms as much. "Those were competing for the longest time but then I think it was ultimately Ken Feldman, who was the art director on all of them, who said that out of all of the ideas, it was the *God Of War* universe that we'd best be able to realise in a really spectacular way. That was when we finally said 'Fuck it, let's go with this one'."

Hell, it wasn't even *God Of War* back then. "After *Twisted Metal Black* shipped, we spent probably four or five months iterating about four ideas – talking to the team, seeing what they would be into, fleshing out some of the concepts to see which one had the greatest potential. From that, ultimately *Dark Odyssey* – which became *God Of War* – won out, kicking off with the high concept of 'What if Paul Verhoeven had directed *Clash Of The Titans*?' but we changed that to 'What if Ridley Scott had directed *Clash Of The Titans*?' for the second document because nobody knew who Paul Verhoeven was."

Lack of cinema knowledge on the production team's end aside, it seems as though Jaffe and his team had prepared concepts for *God Of War* that differed radically from that original seed. "I still have a document showing the very adult, edgy and violent version of what this game could be, which is obviously what it became, but also all the way down to sort of Disney's *Hercules*... maybe we'd do something that was a little more *Mario*," he tells us. "We originally started out with the idea of doing first-person melee, so *God Of War* was originally going to be first-person. It didn't get very far – we talked to some of the programmers about it and did a lot of research. Dreamcast had a game out at the time that was kind of the best in breed for first-person melee, called *Maken X*. We studied that a lot trying to figure out if we

■ Unique combat moves while hanging and climbing made Kratos feel all-powerful. There's no situation in which you're left without a way in which to ruin someone's day.

DELETED SCENES

David Jaffe on the sequences that didn't quite make the cut

THE LIFT

"We built a wonderful level which you can see on some of the behind-the-scenes materials – an elevator through the desert level. With that elevator level, we couldn't figure out how to get the sand to trap the elevator, so we had to table that."

THE WINGS

"We had the Icarus wings in the first game too and even though I think they look beautiful in the third game, I liked the way we were talking about using them in our game. It was more of a Joust mechanic more about full three-dimensional exploring, combat and flying and less about that kind of tunnel where you're just dodging obstacles. But that's one fucking beautiful tunnel in *God Of War III*."

THE LABYRINTH

"Tobin designed a level that I ended up ripping off for *Twisted Metal* (2012). It was a maze that started with Kratos in this big open environment, with the walls coming up and down in real-time and changing the level layout. So it was about being in this space that was constantly changing and having to adjust. So we ended up using that for the arena level in *Twisted Metal* on PS3, but I regret that not going because that was such a cool idea."

Brutal finishing moves were the perfect way to end any encounter, especially considering the extra rewards in the form of Orbs. Man, that Kratos really loves his Orbs...

could make it work. And *GTA III* had just come out, so we were kicking around the idea of open world. So yeah, it really was a very broad initial conceptual phase while we were looking at this idea and a couple of others, and it just sort of evolved into *God Of War* through a great deal of combat and fighting and yelling at each other."

Even though Jaffe is clearly talking about the design process there, he's done an equally good job of describing the game the team ended up making – loud, brash and with precious few pulled punches. That said, the game's violent streak was all kinds of intentional and for a number of reasons. "As a kid I'd seen and read family-friendly Greek mythology, but I was reading Edith Hamilton to research a lot of this stuff before we went into development and the stories themselves can be easily read to be very gruesome and violent. It was definitely a good fit," explains Jaffe. "It wasn't like we were saying we wanted to do an ultra-violent Lego game – it was more about taking that mythology and playing up the angle that it was really violent, which seems to be something our audience really responds to. It was just having the awareness to spot that match and allow us a better shot at retail."

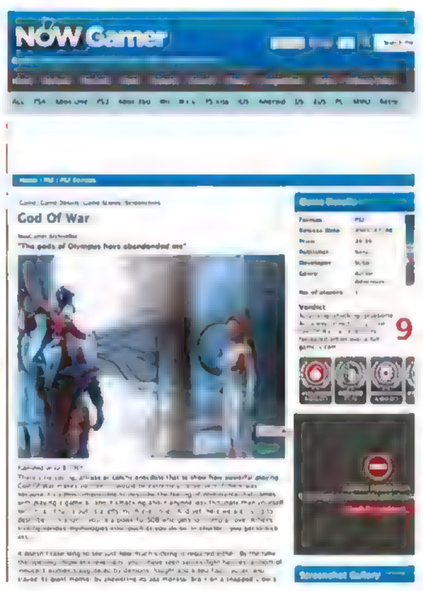
HOLD UP A SECOND – did the games industry's resident swear grenade just cough up some retail jargon? Fear not, the decision to make *God Of War* a bloody rampage wasn't entirely written in dollar signs – it was as much a creative decision as it was a commercial one. "I like violent stuff," Jaffe reveals, to the surprise of literally nobody who has ever played a game the man has worked on. "That's why I said Paul Verhoeven in the original pitch – I like that fun, over-the-top, acrobatic violence in movies and games. But I remember being very clear about the fact that we'd have to make sure that this was brutal and intense because if we didn't add that layer, it would look like you were just a dude running around in a helmet and a toga."

And perhaps that's why this cultural vein hadn't really been tapped at all during gaming's difficult teenage years – good as the source material may have been, nobody could find that angle to make it exciting and fresh. That takes passion, which Jaffe clearly has in spades. He has a deep-seated love for the subject matter and, as evidenced by the best historical shooters, wartime RTS games and even football management titles, sometimes that's enough of a spark to light up a classic. "Greek mythology

Sony Santa Monica got more out of the PS2 than pretty much any of its peers.

There aren't a huge amount of bosses in the original game but regular enemies make up for this shortfall by often being huge.

WHAT THEY SAID...



God Of War manages to keep the pace slick, the settings beautiful, the action fresh and the body count high

NowGamer, 2005

has been something that I've loved since I was in like fourth grade," he shares. "*Clash Of The Titans* was an extremely flawed, wonderful movie – when you're ten years old and watching it, it's just, like... wow. That was the summer of '81 when *Clash Of The Titans* came out, *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* had come out, and when you look at *God Of War*, there's clearly a great deal of influence from both of those films. It's like superheroes – it's totally ready to go for videogame creation, with all these amazing powers, monsters, abilities and locations. And very few people had trodden that territory at that time."

Since nobody had done a proper mythological adventure in quite some time, it stands to reason that another would be announced while Sony Santa Monica's baby was still in the womb. "I remember once, we were waist-deep in development of *God Of War* and we saw a story online about a game... what the fuck was that game called? It came and it went and it got horrible reviews but to see it and to see their concept art and to read their PR, we just thought we were gonna be so fucking dead," recalls Jaffe. "They beat us to the punch, those sons of bitches!" Fortunately for Sony, this is the games industry, and not every title has the heavyweight credentials or the vision to turn a great concept into a great game, and Jaffe tells us about the moment the competition stopped... well, competing. "We saw it at E3 and breathed a sigh of relief – it wasn't all that great, not to be disrespectful to the people who made it but clearly they were hampered by budget issues."

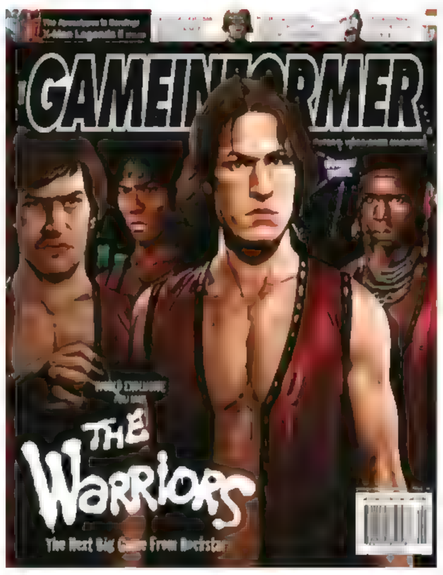
WHETHER HE'S TALKING about *Rygar* or *Shadow Of Rome* or any number of the nine million other PS2 games we've forgotten is kind of irrelevant – it's a classic scenario that we see to this day (albeit to a lesser extent, now that budgets on triple-A games have gone daft) where lesser publishers and developers will sniff out popular themes for upcoming hits and try to outrun them. We can count on one hand the number of times it has really worked out, so maybe the budget hike has actually helped out in that regard. But even so, how was it that *God Of War* stumbled upon this content goldmine that every other game just strolled past on the way to work each day?

I WAS HEAVILY INFLUENCED – AND I'M SURE I'M NOT ALONE – BY RAY HARRYHAUSEN AND HIS WORK

"I guess it has to do with influences, right?," reasons Jaffe. "I was heavily influenced – and I'm sure I'm not alone – by Ray Harryhausen and his work. That was always something that appealed to me and

■ It's surprisingly hard to take a screenshot of *God Of War* where something isn't bleeding to death...

WHAT THEY SAID...



Difficult to resist the urge to simply genuflect and be humbled to be in the presence of such digital divinity

Game Informer, Issue 145 May 2005

something I wanted to play with. It was around the time that we were doing *God Of War* that we were starting to see a shift towards budgets going up pretty significantly. There was that time too when PSone was still out towards the beginning of PS2 and development was still inexpensive enough that you would see all these different games, things like *Second Sight* and *Psi-Ops* – there was this game on PSone, *Tale Of The Sun* or something, about a fucking caveman! – which are the kinds of subjects that are now more the world of indies, because they're affordable and you can take those kinds of chances. We came at the end of that, when most games had started having to play safe, whether it was military shooters or, at the time, crime sims like *GTA*. But Sony being Sony was always so great about letting their developers explore things that aren't just marketing-sanctioned safe genres and we were still allowed to play in those waters."

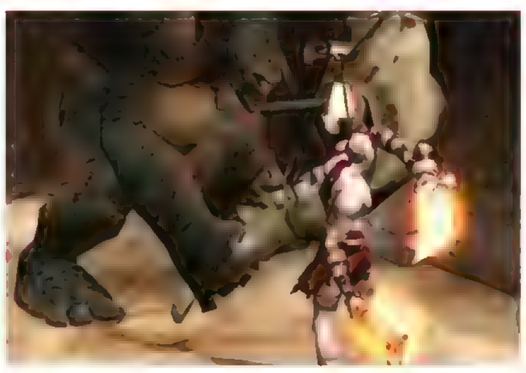
Today's market, of course, is somewhat different. Big name studios and publishers have shut up shop and others have tightened purse-strings, while unrealistic goals have seen successful games be judged otherwise. "I think it'd be really hard and expensive to compete today purely on spectacle," Jaffe nods. "But what's cool is that there are elements of *God Of War* that have nothing to do with the spectacle – level design, story, characters – that you can do with two or three people with a copy of *Unity* or *Game Maker Pro*. That's phenomenal and in that way, the market is wonderful today. But I think if you're talking about building a game where the total reason for it to exist is spectacular setpieces... it's still doable for sure but you have to have a *lot* of fucking money. That was the reason I went away after that game and moved onto more mechanics-based titles. You're only as good as your tech on that day. I want our games to stand up even after the visuals aren't as hot as they once were, where the core mechanics are something you could come back to ten years later and say 'Okay, it's really rough but fuck, it's still really fun'. I don't think I've achieved that yet but working with that game showed me that for me, that was sort of the North Star to follow. If you just chase the spectacle, the applause you get for it is pretty fucking cheap."

I WANT OUR GAMES TO STAND UP TEN YEARS LATER

■■■ SPECTACLE MUST HAVE been fairly high on the agenda in creating *God Of War*, mind. But were there any examples of tech not being able to match concept? "The game was so scripted that there wasn't a lot," Jaffe muses. "When we asked for something and they said they couldn't do it, usually that was coming from production rather than tech." One issue, though, would have given Digital Foundry a collective heart attack. "There was the giant crusher at the bottom of Pandora's temple and [the guys] just kept throwing enemies in until it dropped to like 12fps. But we all thought it was fucking awesome – we didn't care that it was 12fps 'cause the idea was so cool and it still worked. But then Tim came over and you'd have

> A GAMING EVOLUTION Legacy Of Kain: Soul Reaver > God Of War > Bayonetta

Raziel's starring role was a game about spectacle and a journey, two areas on which Jaffe and his team spent a lot of time.



Witches, angels, swearing and a bit of the old ultra-violence... Platinum's hardcore action game takes it to the next level.

thought that his head was about to explode. We fought about frame rate. I care about frame rate only when it hampers the game. So we fought about that, but there was one fight I did lose. I just couldn't convince Tim and Mike and even to this day I'm like 'What the fuck?' – I think he must have made a deal with the devil saying 'I will make you a great programmer but you must never use translucency in any game' or something. I kept saying that we had to have the environment go semi-transparent or we'd have to pull the camera too far back, and we wanted to keep the camera close so it was more dramatic. Almost every other game out there was making the characters and/or the environment go semi-transparent, but you'd have thought I was asking him to go assassinate his parents or something. It was not going to be done on his motherfucking watch. It was fucking bad and even to this day, you can tell I'm still a little annoyed by it, because we could have had some amazing cinematic moments in that game if it weren't for the fact that the goddamn engine didn't support translucency."

Sure, Kratos can use different weapons, but the Blades Of Chaos are always most satisfying.

For all that it may seem like *God Of War* might today be a case of style over substance – especially with so many unlikely usurpers in the likes of *Revengeance*, *Bayonetta* and *DmC* strutting their hardcore action stuff – that absolutely wasn't the case with the original. Jaffe reflects on meetings of minds where gameplay had to come first. "The guys at Santa Monica are some of the best of the best when it comes to programming. And whenever I asked for something or heard a great idea from the team, most of the time a month later it was in the game. They were a pretty impressive group to work with." Have the special effects guys kill the rainbows and the twinkly music, though – this is Jaffe we're talking to, not Bono. "But they were a pain in the ass to work with, and I'm sure they'd say the

Petrified? Worry not – escaping is as easy as waggling an analog stick.

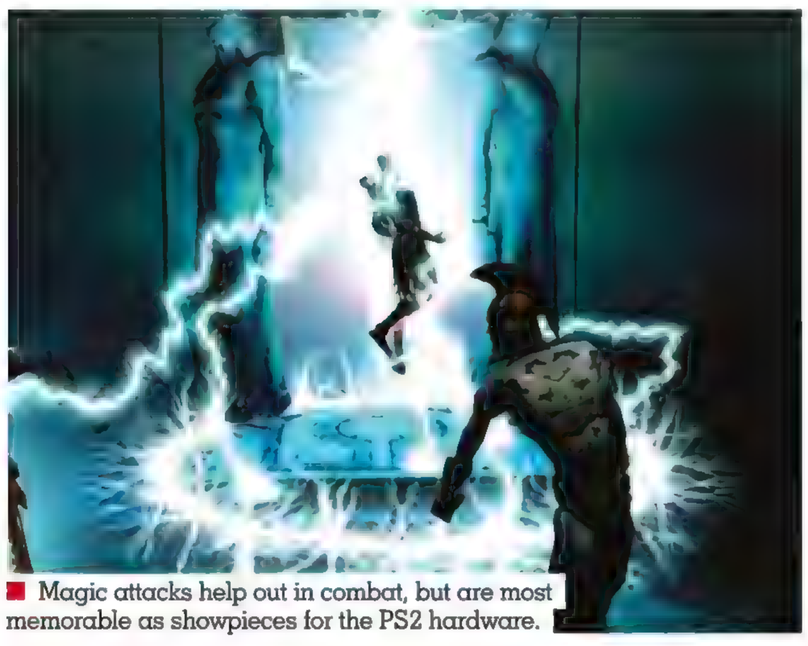
As much as we dig *God Of War*'s concept art, we'd love to see the Disney-style mock-ups that Jaffe mentions.

same about me," he admits. "Tim and I really didn't get along very well. Me being American and him being British, him being a programmer and me being more of a high-level designer... just one against the other, even just culturally, that can sometimes be enough to break the camel's back. But when you've got cultural *and* discipline differences and you put those people on a project for three years together? I'd work with Tim again, I don't know if he'd work with me but I respect him greatly as a programmer. We got along fine outside of it. But as colleagues, I fucking wanted to blow his head off every single day and I think he probably wanted to do the same thing to me."

Internal struggles aside, it all looked rosy just as soon as the Hydra demo hit and people got to experience the game themselves. But even with that buzz going around, there was still enough apprehension to make the team second-guess themselves at every turn, as Jaffe vividly recalls. "I remember being at the office with Todd Papy, looking up at this giant poster of Kratos that we'd had made for E3 – it still hangs in the Sony Santa Monica office, actually – and thinking 'This is going to be fucking *huge*'. But within a week, I was in Gamestop and saw the *God Of War* 'coming soon' box and it was stuck way up high on the shelf out of the way. Nothing had changed – if anything, the game had only gotten better as we got closer to completion – but I remember thinking it was going to fucking tank and be a disaster." But, as it happens, *God Of War* was quite a good videogame (hence this celebration) and such a success for Sony that it's now easily one of the leading PlayStation brands. But there wasn't always such confidence, even internally. "On the day of release, a friend of mine texted me to say

Stabbing a cyclops in its one eye felt a bit mean at first, but we'd soon come to revel in the carnage.

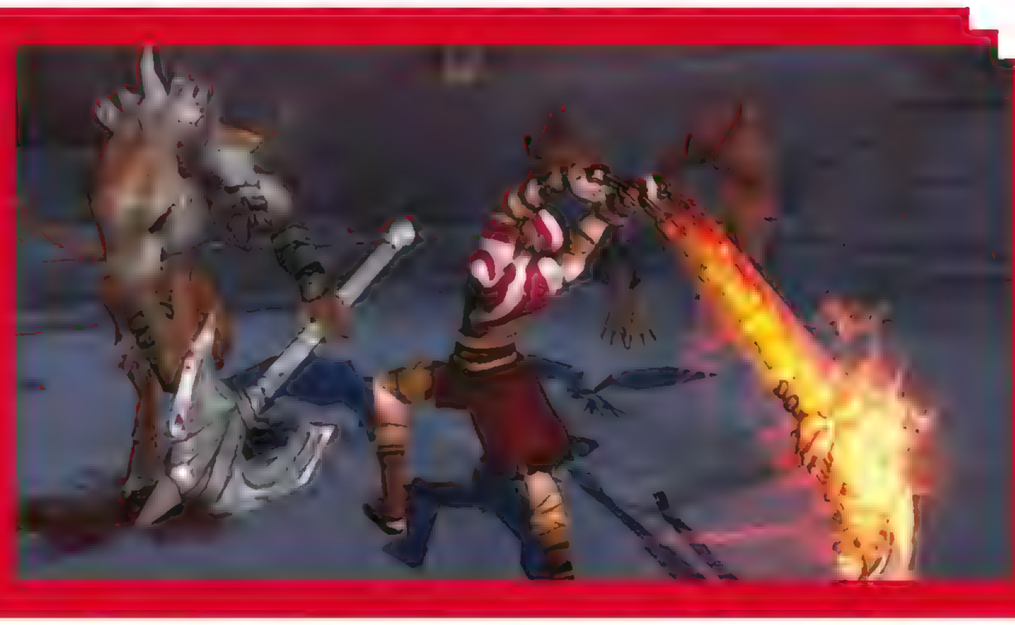
We daren't think how many times we beat that original Hydra demo. It was lots, though.



Magic attacks help out in combat, but are most memorable as showpieces for the PS2 hardware.

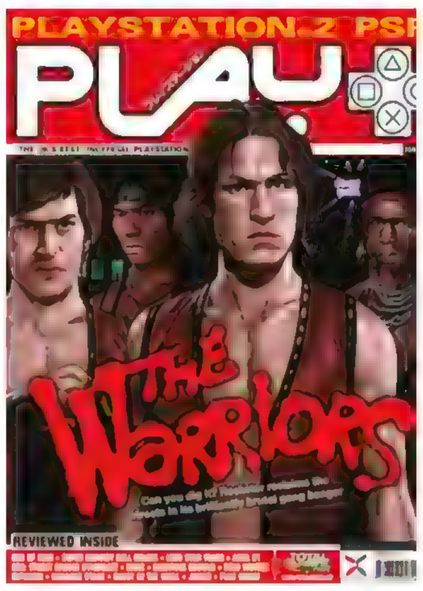
ON LETTING GO

CREATING AN ICON for a company you don't belong to can't exactly be easy, but David Jaffe is surprisingly upfront about how he managed to avoid forging bonds with Kratos as a character. "I feel an attachment to the first and second games," he tells us. "The others are titles that I have great respect for – friends of mine have worked on them, some that I hold in incredibly high regard. I love to see them succeed, and as a company as well given the investment. But I don't feel an attachment. I feel a connection to the first two titles but post-*GOWII*, I've had zero regrets. I've watched them and cheered them on from the sidelines but I don't feel like it's my character out there or anything like that."



Combining area attacks and more powerful linear strikes makes for a versatile move set – one where mashing is fine but there's depth as well.

WHAT THEY SAID...



It's set in Greece with the mighty Kratos... and we loved every minute of it

Play, issue 129
May 2005

there was a line out the door at the game store," Jaffe tells us. "I thought he was full of shit but there totally was this line out the door. We had days when we thought we were onto something and days where we sat around figuring out what our next careers were going to be 'cause we were clearly no good at this."

SOME CRITICS WOULD argue that there's a case to be made for the latter, especially in light of some of the game's end-game sequences. "Well, Tobin did the spikes," smiles Jaffe as his new studio explodes with enough laughter to level a small village. The accused interjects. "You were just supposed to get knocked down the spikes a little bit, just so you wouldn't get stuck on them," explains level designer Tobin A. Russell. "You weren't supposed to get knocked off entirely." The problem, it seems, was born of over-confidence. "The coders promised they were going to deal with the collision on that," Jaffe confesses. "But what happened was we had focus-tested the shit out of that game and it's a linear process so by the time we got to focus-testing Hades – which is where that area is, at the end of the level – we were just like 'Nah, we got it, we're good'. It was literally the last level of the game so we didn't focus test that one, and that was the one that bit us in the ass. I regret that section, because it really was a shelf moment for a number of gamers."

[HADES] WAS THE LAST LEVEL OF THE GAME, SO WE DIDN'T FOCUS TEST THAT ONE, AND IT BIT US IN THE ASS

Do it, Kratos. Give that guy a really nasty rope burn. The demigod's violent streak can never be sated.

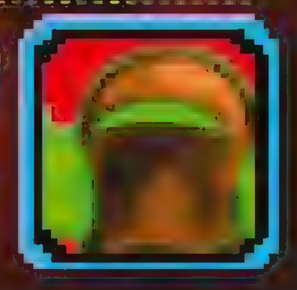
Issues aside, it's fair to say that *God Of War* carved out a template for a generation of would-be mascots to follow. But, as it turns out, some of the biggest names in the business can't tell you when they're onto something. "It was all just a big fucking blur," Jaffe admits. "There were a lot of nights where we were there until three in the morning and those nights blend into the other nights. There are people that you meet that you'd want to work with for the rest of your career, then there are people that I have wonderful memories of but won't speak to today. I can't fucking stand some of them today and some of them I think are just amazing. There are all these little moments that sort of add up to give you a recollection of an experience that, in my mind, was extremely hard but extremely fulfilling and extremely worthwhile. We made something that we're really proud of."

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 2: NEW AGE OF HEROES DREAMCAST 2000

Fighting game bosses are infamously difficult to get right, and *Marvel Vs. Capcom 2's* Abyss trod the line between well thought-out monstrosity and cheap, shape-shifting irritant. Hellbent on sending the Earth back into a primordial stew, Abyss was more than just a boss, he forced you to learn how to execute all of *Marvel Vs. Capcom's* different mechanics. His first form required you to master hopping and jumping to avoid his armour suit's slow, sweeping attacks, while his second form (a green humanoid thing) requires ranged attacks to counteract his paralyzing projectiles. The third and final demon Abyss (pictured) relies on brute strength and spamming energy beam attacks – twitch guarding and taking advantage of recovery frame-rates is the only way to dominate here. Abyss can be a horrible experience, but if you know how to pick him apart, he can be taken down hard.

PRESS START BUTTON

ABYSS



GAME CHANGERS

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

Released: 1991 **Publisher:** Sega **Developer:** Sonic Team **System:** Mega Drive

There aren't as many secrets in *Sonic* as there are in *Mario*, but if you're prepared to experiment you will find them.

We examine the industry's most important videogames, looking at their influence and what made them so great in the first place. Join us as we take a look at Sonic The Hedgehog, Sega's answer to Mario

FLATTERY BY IMITATION is rife within the videogame industry, with one company often emulating the success of another to further its own success. By far one of the biggest examples is Sega's *Sonic The Hedgehog*; a franchise created to compete directly against Nintendo's *Mario* series.

Sega's Master System, while popular in Europe, had failed to make a big impact in the US or Japan, where it trailed massively behind Nintendo's NES. Sega already had a mascot by the name of Alex Kidd, and while he had starred in several popular games, he was no Mario. Wanting to rectify this, Sega had numerous developers submit character designs to its AM8 department and eventually settled on a creation by Naoto Oshima. It was a cute blue hedgehog who was then known as Mr Needlemouse. Created from a number of inspirations that ranged from the shoes of Michael Jackson to the blue of Sega's corporate logo, Mr Needlemouse was given a spiky 'can do' attitude that would appeal more to Western gamers. He was then handed over to Yuji Naka, who worked in the five-man AM8 development team that would go on to become known as Sonic Team.

Work began on *Sonic The Hedgehog* in April 1990, with Yuji Naka on main programming duties. The small team worked for just over a year, with Sonic finally making his debut on 23 June 1991. *Sonic The Hedgehog* became an immediate success, and before long it had replaced *Altered Beast* as the Mega Drive's pack-in game of choice. The same thing happened on Sega's 8-bit console, with the Master System version (which was completely different to the Mega Drive offering) replacing *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* on the Master System II.

MAGIC MOMENTS | SONIC IS FULL OF MAGIC MOMENTS. IF WE WERE TO PICK JUST THREE, THOUGH, THESE ARE OUR FAVOURITES...

THAT INTRO

★ FROM THE MOMENT Sonic rushes across the screen and 'Sega' screams from your TV, the character's iconic status was secured. It's further reinforced by Sonic popping up and wagging his finger, just to show you how Nineties he is.

CHAOS QUEST

★ REACH THE END of Act 1 or 2 with 50 rings or more and you'll be transported to Sonic's Special Stage, an awesome level that must be completed in order to retrieve the Chaos Emerald found at the stage's centre.

THE NEED FOR SPEED

★ THE SPEED OF *Sonic The Hedgehog* remains one of its best mechanics. It makes even more of an impact when you pick up the relevant power-up and can speed through loops and across collapsible platforms like a hedgehog possessed.

■■■ WHILE THE MASTER System version is an incredibly slick platformer, it's arguably the Mega Drive outing that helped give Sega a much-needed edge over Nintendo. The speed of Sonic was absolutely blistering, making Mario look decidedly sluggish and old hat in comparison. Sonic was cool and spunky and had a much-desired attitude that Nintendo's plumber simply couldn't match. Of course it also helped that *Sonic* was an exceptionally fantastic platformer, and while it lacked the depth of *Super Mario World* (which had debuted some seven months earlier) it was quite clear that there was nothing else like *Sonic* on any other system.

Even if you ignored the breakneck pace at which Sonic ran, there was no denying that it was an aesthetic delight. The abstract designs of Sonic's different worlds (known as zones) further set it apart from the generic-looking environments of many other platformers of the time. Green Hill Zone was full of sharp-edged trees and chequerboard hills, Labyrinth Zone had a distinctly Aztec styling to it, while Star Light Zone offered sparkling backdrops and huge loops to negotiate. Each and every one of Sonic's six main zones (split into acts) were full of detail and featured bright primary colours that perfectly complemented the high speed action that Sonic Team's game offered.

SONIC HAD AN ATTITUDE THAT MARIO SIMPLY COULDN'T MATCH

KEY FACTS

■ Reach the end of an Act with 50 rings or more and Sonic gets the chance to collect a precious Chaos Emerald. Collecting all emeralds unlocks a different ending.

■ The Master System version has a different story to the Mega Drive game, as it's set afterwards. It still features Dr Robotnik, but many of the zones are completely different in design.

■ Such was the success of the Mega Drive pack-in that it enabled Sega to overtake Nintendo's market share for the first time in six years. In 1991 Sega counted for 65 per cent of the console market.

And yet there was more to Sonic than simply moving as fast as possible. While some would later go on to complain that the game was simply about 'pressing right and jumping at the right moment', the level design proved to be every bit as memorable as *Sonic*'s glorious visuals. Although the levels lacked the sheer depth and variety that *Mario* games offered, they still proved a joy to navigate. Let Sonic explore his environments instead of simply racing through them and you soon discover all sorts of delightful secrets tucked away that would lead to rings and various power-ups.

The rings were also a key aspect of *Sonic*'s appeal, being a way of earning extra lives or acting as a useful shield. Whenever Sonic hit an enemy he would drop rings if he was carrying them, allowing him to quickly recover any before they disappeared completely. Hit an enemy without them, however, and he's robbed of a life. It's a neat mechanic that still holds up brilliantly today and remains a key component of practically every *Sonic* game since.

Equally memorable was Sonic's nemesis, Dr Robotnik, who would attack Sonic at the end of each final zone with all kinds of crazy contraptions, only to flee in terror when he was finally bested. As Bowser was for Mario, Dr Robotnik proved to be the perfect foil for Sega's new mascot and has hassled him ever since, gaining even more outlandish machines as console technology has continued to grow in power.

With *Sonic The Hedgehog*, Sonic Team created an unforgettable platformer that built on the DNA of past games but left its own distinct blueprint for others to follow. Even now, over 25 years after its original release, numerous digital releases as well as 2017's *Sonic Mania* and *Sonic Forces* ensure that a new generation are able to experience that 16-bit magic.

BEFORE SONIC

PLATFORMERS BEFORE SONIC CAME ALONG

PITFALL! 1982

The ground-breaking platformer from David Crane was one of Activision's first big hitters and introduced many key mechanics that would go on to appear in later scrolling platformers.

PAC-LAND 1984

Interesting *Pac-Man* arcade spin-off that saw the iconic Namco mascot sprout legs and run through deviously designed stages on his quest to enter Fairyland. It was later ported to numerous home systems.

SUPER MARIO BROS 1985

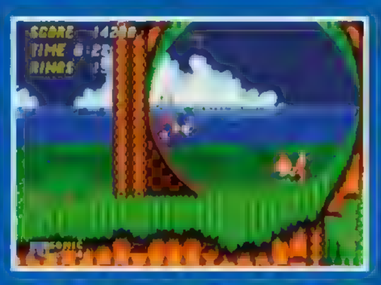
Landmark release from Nintendo that turned Mario into a superstar and created the template for virtually every *Mario* game that has appeared since. It went on to sell over 40 million units.

WONDER BOY 1985

Popular arcade game starring a precocious prehistoric tyke who used a hammer and skateboard to rescue his beloved girlfriend. *Wonder Boy* later went on to spawn several sequels, including Hudson Soft's *Adventure Island* franchise.

NOTABLE SEQUELS

SONIC HAS APPEARED IN COUNTLESS GAMES. HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF THEM...



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2
1992

This masterful sequel not only improved on the level design, but also introduced sidekick Miles 'Tails' Prower. It's widely regarded as the best 2D *Sonic* – and rightly so.

SONIC CD
1993

This excellent platformer was originally exclusive to the Mega CD and centred on clever time travel mechanics. It's since been released on numerous digital systems, from iOS to PC.

SONIC & KNUCKLES
1994

An experiment that featured lock-on technology to allow the last three *Sonic* games to be combined with it, creating effects like new levels or the ability to play as Knuckles.

SONIC THE FIGHTERS
1996

The concept is sound, but this is an atrocious beat-'em-up that does no favours to Sonic. He wouldn't appear in a decent fighting game until *Super Smash Bros Brawl*.

SONIC ADVENTURE
1998

While it's somewhat ruined by an annoying central hub, the action stages of *Sonic Adventure* capture the insane excitement of the early 2D *Sonic* games.

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
2006

Sonic's first next-gen outing was quite simply terrible, with bland level design, floaty controls and annoying camera angles. It marked the first appearance of Silver the Hedgehog.

THE DARK BROTHERHOOD
2008

BioWare turns its hand to the *Sonic* universe with interesting results. The dialogue is a little weak, but it's saved by solid combat and an entertaining story.

SONIC AND THE BLACK KNIGHT
2009

Arming Sonic with a sword sounds like another crazy gimmick, but this one actually works. The end result is a solid Wii platformer with a heavy focusing on combo chains.

SONIC & ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED
2012

An excellent racing game that pits Sonic against other Sega characters. It improves on the original with better tracks and transforming vehicles.

SONIC DASH
2013

Sonic rips off *Temple Run* and, if we're honest, it makes for a far more entertaining game. There's a lack of levels, but it doesn't hurt your pocket with in-app purchases.

WHAT YUJI NAKA DID NEXT

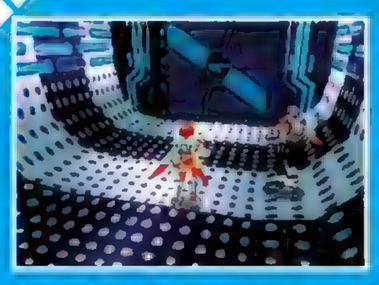
NON-SONIC GAMES THAT NAKA HAS BEEN INVOLVED WITH

RISTAR
1995

This entertaining and charming platformer never gets the love it deserves. Naka was involved with *Ristar*'s design, once revealing that the main character had started off life as a rabbit.

NIGHTS INTO DREAMS
1996

A delightful arcade attack game from Sonic Team that produced a wonderful feeling of freedom and delivered imagination-base encounters. Naka was a programmer.



BURNING RANGERS
1998

Superb 3D action outing from Sonic Team that sees the player putting out dangerous fires and rescuing trapped civilians. Naka was on production duties.

LET'S TAP
2008

Naka's first project after forming Prope was an interesting selection of mini-games for the Wii that saw the player tapping on cardboard boxes. The vibrations would then be picked up by the Wii Remote.

IVY THE KIWI?
2009

An interesting puzzle game where the player must guide Ivy to her mother by drawing lines that stop her from walking into danger. It's extremely similar to *Kirby: Canvas Curse*.

PLATFORM GAMES INSPIRED BY SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

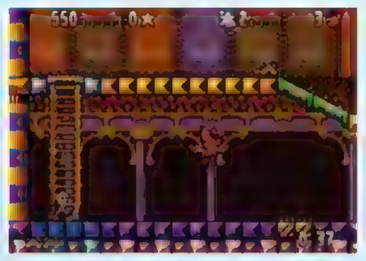
A SELECTION OF THE MANY GAMES THAT HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY SONIC. SOME GOOD, SOME BAD...

ZOOL
1992

Gremlin's Ninja of the Nth Dimension was as fast as Sonic, but the gameplay was nowhere near as impressive and it remains a poor alternative to Sega's popular hedgehog.

AWESOME POSSUM
1993

Annoying platformer with an environmental theme. It's a bad clone of *Sonic* with ropey gameplay and bland design. It did boast a large amount of digitised speech, though.



AERO THE ACROBAT
1993

Task-based platformer featuring a cute bat. He became a mascot for publisher Sunsoft and secured a sequel in 1994.

An effort that's worth investigating.

ALFRED CHICKEN
1993

Alfred is surprisingly good, mainly thanks to charming visuals and solid level design. A sequel/remake went on to appear on PlayStation in 2002.

ZERO THE KAMIKAZE SQUIRREL
1994

Zero was Aero's rival, but became big enough to get his own game. It's surprisingly decent as well, with Zero gliding to get around the large levels.

CRASH BANDICOOT
1996

Excellent 3D platformer from Naughty Dog that boasted incredible smart level design, great graphics and some truly jaw-dropping technical effects.

KLONOA: DOOR TO PHANTOMILE
1997

Excellent 2.5D platformer from Namco starring a cute long-eared cat that was remade on Wii. It remains a relatively low-key franchise.

PINOBEE: WINGS OF ADVENTURE
2001

This was a launch title for the GBA and starred a cute bee. While the levels are rather large, floaty controls and bland gameplay let it down.

SCALER
2004

An interesting oddity from A2M (not to be confused with Sega's AM2) that stars a chameleon who can transform into five distinctive mutant lizards.

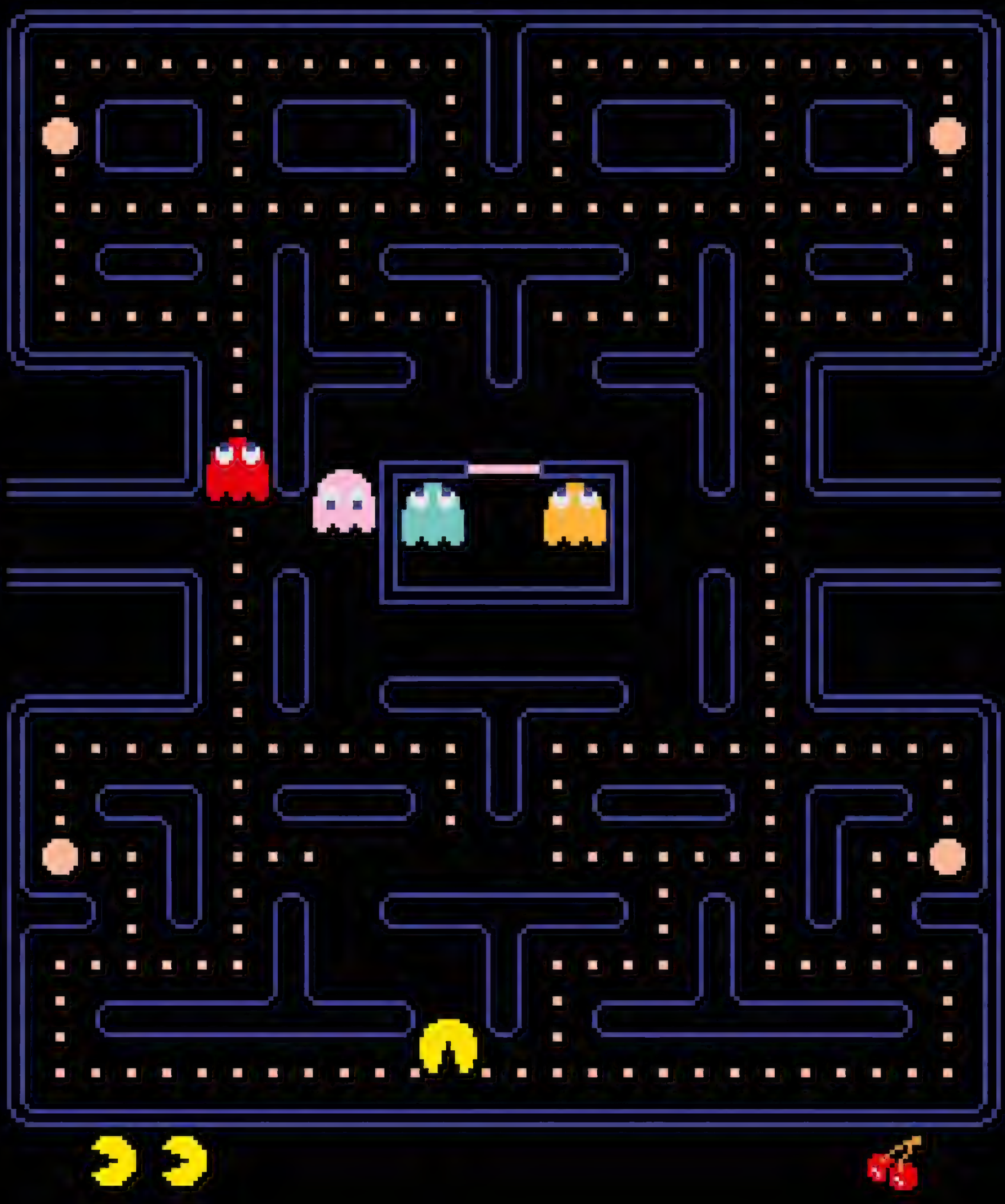
RAYMAN ORIGINS
2011

Excellent reboot of Michel Ancel's popular hero that featured clever level design and truly stunning artwork. A sequel, *Rayman Legends*, was released in 2013.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...

PAC-MAN

He's over 35 years old, is one of gaming's biggest icons and arguably its first mascot. As star of numerous games and TV shows, we felt it was time to revisit Pac-Man's vast back catalogue



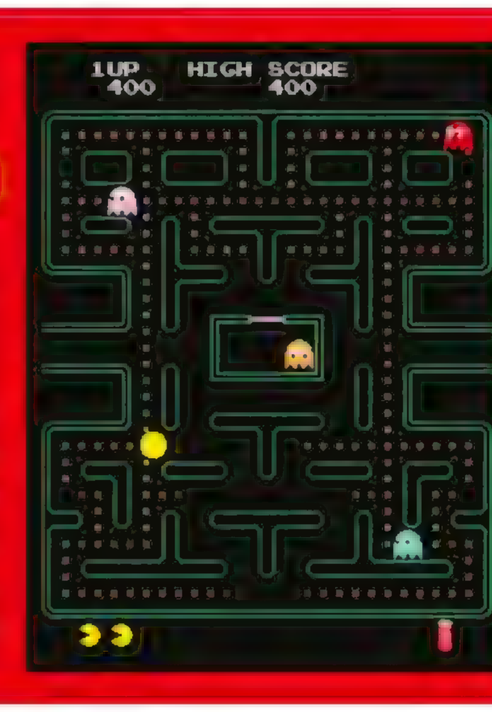
A FEW VIDEOGAME CHARACTERS are as well known as Namco's Pac-Man. Like Mario and Sonic, he's escaped videogames to appear in all sorts of other media, from TV shows to songs, including a top-ten hit single, and is instantly recognisable to even non-gamers.

Created by Toru Iwatani and designed to be appealing to both male and female gamers, *Pac-Man* went on to become a massive success for Namco, although it did take a while for Japanese gamers to warm to him. He's now Namco's biggest licence, creating millions (mainly in merchandising) each year for the company, while still showing up in the odd innovative game that breaks beyond his original maze routes.

He's also had his fair share of TV shows, with his most recent, *Pac-Man And The Ghostly Adventures*, airing for three seasons between 2013 and 2015. Join us as we go through his back catalogue and reveal just how many games he's starred in.

PAC-MAN PLUS 1982

SYSTEM: ARCADE



Another game created by Midway without Namco's permission. It's essentially the original *Pac-Man* but features more aggressive ghosts, random events (eating a power pellet might turn all but one ghost blue or turn the maze invisible), and faster-paced gameplay. One for the *Pac-Man* hardcore as it's tough as proverbial old boots.

PAC-MAN 1980

SYSTEM: ARCADE

This is it, this is where it all began. *Pac-Man*'s story origins are well told, with even Scott Pilgrim using *Pac-Man* facts to try and ensnare the girl of his dreams. With his iconic look being partly inspired by a missing slice of pizza, and his rampant need to eat, Iwatani's creation felt like a breath of fresh air on release. Many arcade games at the time were clones of *Space Invaders* and other popular shoot-'em-ups, so Pac-Man's frantic rush around a maze, gobbling pills while he tried to avoid the intelligent ghosts, was a welcome respite.

MS. PAC-MAN 1981

SYSTEM: ARCADE

Ms. Pac-Man wasn't even created by Namco, instead starting off life as a kit for *Pac-Man* called *Crazy Otto*. General Computer Corporation showed its game to Midway (Namco's US distributor) who instantly commissioned it and changed its sprites to make them more *Pac-Man*-centric. It's easy to see why Midway supported the game – it would eventually lose the *Pac-Man* licence after creating numerous other *Pac-Man* games without Namco's consent – as it boasted a variety of additional levels and warp tunnels, making for a far more varied play experience. Like *Pac-Man*, it went on to receive numerous ports and helped inspire the *Pac-Man* family that would eventually appear in Hanna Barbara's cartoon series.

PROFESSOR PAC-MAN 1983

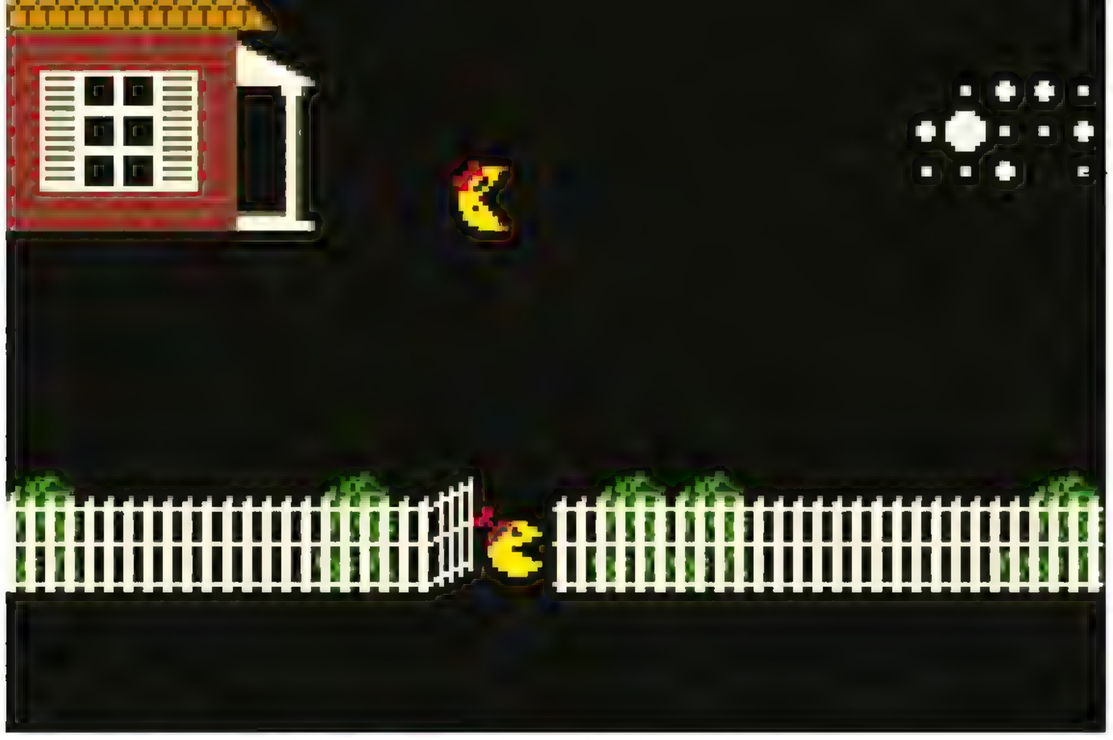
SYSTEM: ARCADE

Created to cash in on the popular quiz genre, this is a baffling entry to the series that features time-based puzzles you must answer as quickly as possible by selecting one of three possible answers. Some of the puzzles are quite clever, but it's instantly forgettable, which may explain why it got converted to Pac-Land machines a year after its release.

PAC & PAL 1983

SYSTEM: ARCADE

This interesting oddity never appeared outside of Japan. Pac-Man must eat cards, which will in turn unlock the items he needs to munch on to clear each level. The interesting addition here though is Miru, a ghost who would latch onto the items Pac-Man uncovers and return them to the ghost house. This in itself is a design mechanic, as she'll clear the level if she has the last needed item. It's again a little too fiddly for its own good, but has more depth than *Super Pac-Man*. An alternate version known as *Pac-Man & Chomp Chomp* featured Pac-Man's dog from the cartoon series instead of Miru.



JR. PAC-MAN 1983

SYSTEM: ARCADE

This was Midway's last *Pac-Man* game before Namco regained control of the franchise. It's a quirky one as well, with impressive cut scenes and a far larger maze, which required the screen to move to keep up with Jr. Pac-Man. Another interesting touch is the random objects that marched around the screen. Unlike previous games, they turn dots into bigger ones, which gave you more points but also slowed Jr. Pac-Man down. An interesting addition to the series that's certainly worth investigating.

PAC-LAND 1984

SYSTEM: ARCADE

Another new twist on the *Pac-Man* formulae, this time by Namco. This is one of the earliest scrolling platformers, predating even *Super Mario Bros.* It's a good one as well, with Pac-Man running through Pac-Land and avoiding the ever-annoying presence of Blinky, Pinky, Inky and Clyde as they try to catch him using numerous contraptions. It's notable for using a three-button system to play and a tight time limit. Extremely popular, this version went on to receive numerous home ports.

PAC-MANIA 1987

SYSTEM: ARCADE

Pac-Mania was the biggest change yet for the popular franchise. It featured stunning isometric mazes spread across four different worlds, and two additional ghosts making for six in total. Luckily Pac-Man was blessed with the ability to jump, which made it a lot easier to navigate the tricky labyrinths. There are also random power-ups that can do things like increase Pac-Man's speed, while the two new ghosts jump when Pac-Man jumps, which creates another interesting twist to the core mechanics.

PAC-ATTACK 1993

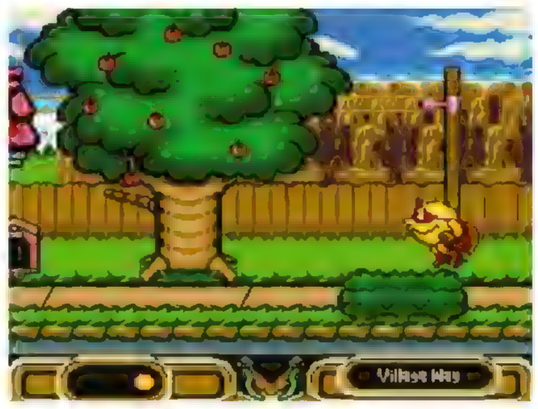
SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Pac-Man's first original console game was a fantastic little puzzle game that was essentially a remixed version of the obscure coin-operated *Cosmo Gang The Puzzle*. In it, blocks and ghosts fall down into the well and the player must then use Pac-Man to clear the ghosts and create full rows of blocks (which will then disappear *Tetris*-style). It's a highly addictive puzzler that also features an excellent versus mode, as well as a puzzle mode with 100 clever puzzles to solve.

PAC-MAN 2: THE NEW ADVENTURES 1994

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, SNES

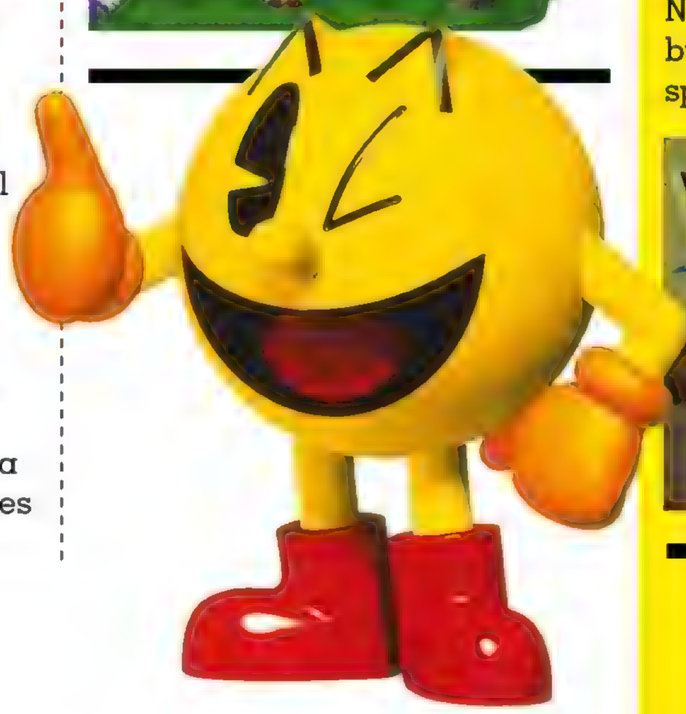
Another unusual departure for *Pac-Man*, but not a good one. It's a slow-paced quasi-adventure in which you must travel around Pac-Land solving various Pac-In-Time fetch quests. You have no direct control over Pac-Man and must use a catapult to affect him. The expressions Pac-Man pulls off are fantastic, but the slow pace kills it.



PAC-IN-TIME 1994

SYSTEM: SNES

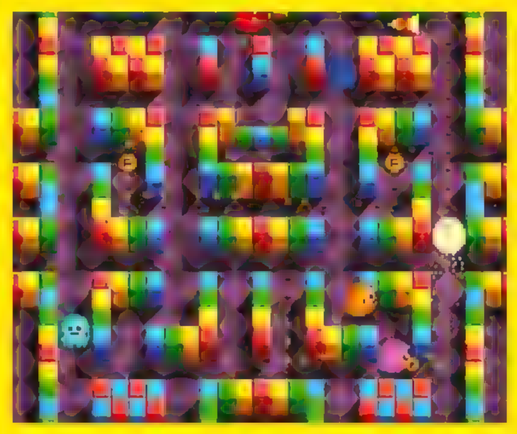
This is simply a rebranded version of *Fury Of The Furries* and was exclusive to the SNES. Despite this, it remains a highly entertaining game, featuring far more puzzle elements than previous games in the series. Pac-Man now traverses large areas in search of pellets and must typically unlock four different power-ups (that range from a hanging rope he can swing on to the ability to breathe fire) to complete his quest. It's a fun game that should have reached a much larger audience.



PAC-MAN ARRANGEMENT 1996

SYSTEM: ARCADE

Pac-Man's first arcade game in nine years was a huge improvement over the basic *Pac-Man* formulae. There's a new ghost by the name of Kinky, who can combine with the others to create unique new forms that really change the way you approach their transformations. New Dash arrows either speed Pac-Man up (letting him stun ghosts) or slow him down, while Warp Gates quickly transport him across the maze. It plays at a nice pace and features gorgeous presentation. Easily one of the best *Pac-Man* games and one that has turned up on numerous compilations over the years.



PAC-MAN WORLD 1999 (2004 GBA)

SYSTEM: PLAYSTATION, GBA

Pac-Man World isn't going to win any originality, as it's a pretty basic 3D platformer that will mainly appeal to youngsters. Having said that, there's a lot here that's new to Pac-Man as he celebrates his 20th anniversary. He can swim, bounce on enemies with his arse and even use a handy dash spin like Sonic. Alright, so he's shamelessly nicked his moves from his peers, but Namco has integrated them well into the *Pac-Man* universe, and he's surprisingly sprightly as a result. Not a classic by any means, but an entertaining game that spawned several sequels.

MS. PAC-MAN MAZE MADNESS 2000

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Ms. Pac-Man's second starring game is pretty decent, with a range of different game modes and some new additions to the standard *Pac-Man* formulae. You're still munching pellets, but there's now a huge game world to traverse requiring you to move blocks, blow up walls with dynamite, launch yourself off jump pads and seek out keys to reach the exit. It's complemented by some surprisingly fun multiplayer modes and the original *Ms. Pac-Man*. As with *Pac-Man World*, the GBA version is noticeably cut down.

PAC-MAN: ADVENTURES IN TIME 2000

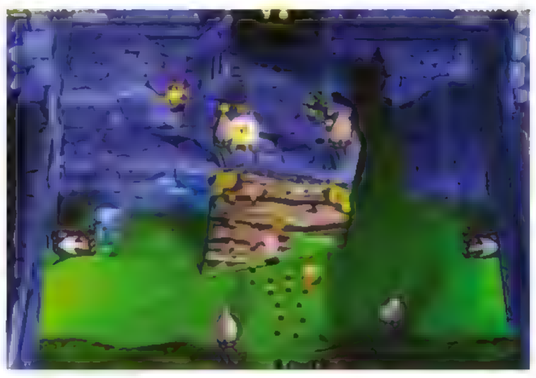
SYSTEM: PC

Another fun addition to the series, if a little on the simple side. Play can switch between a forced perspective or top-down view and mazes often have elevated sections that add strategy.

PAC-MAN ALL-STARS 2002

SYSTEM: PC

All-Stars was only released in the US; a good thing too, as it adds very little to the franchise, unless you're looking for dull multiplayer shenanigans. Thankfully, far better multiplayer games were to come...



PAC-MAN FEVER 2002

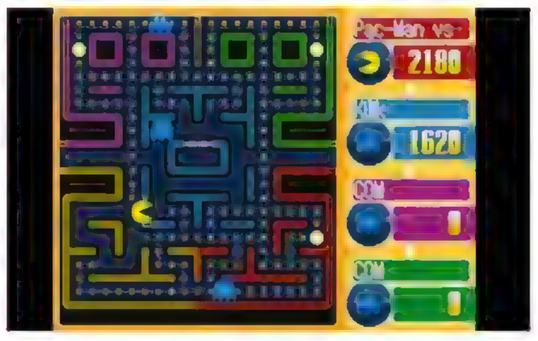
SYSTEM: GAMECUBE, PLAYSTATION 2

Pac-Man once again rips off his peers, this time creating an average clone of *Mario Party*. We love the super deformed Namco characters like Astaroth, Reiko Nagase and Heihachi Mishima, but we didn't like the bland mini-games lack of different boards to play on or the cheating AI. No wonder then that a sequel never materialised.

PAC-MAN VS. 2003

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE, DS

Created by none other than Shigeru Miyamoto, *Pac-Man Vs.* was a multiplayer game designed around the GBA's system link cable. The GBA player controls Pac-Man, while up to four other players control ghosts via the GameCube. It's a truly fantastic little game, foreshadowing the asymmetric gameplay that would eventually shape the Wii U.



PAC-MAN BOWLING 2004

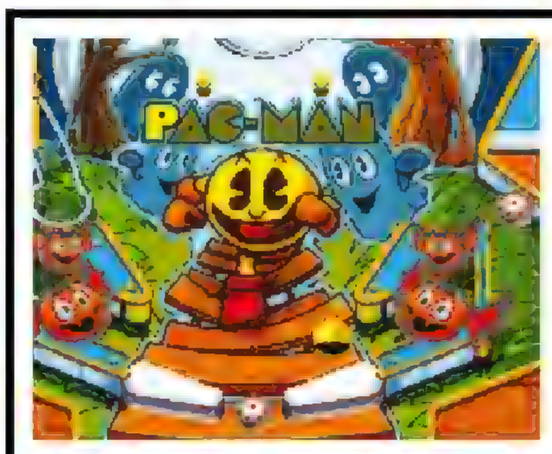
SYSTEM: MOBILE

It's a bowling game, but amazingly, you don't get to throw Pac-Man down the alley. There are four playable characters, including Pac-Man and Inky, each with their own unique move. It's very well-suited to the fiddly controls of mobile phones and plays a surprisingly decent game of bowling.

PAC-PIX 2005

SYSTEM: DS

This was an early DS game that made great use of the stylus and touch screen. You're still eating ghosts, but this time you must draw Pac-Man and keep him on screen using walls, the stroke of which determines the direction Pac-Man moves in. You only have a certain amount of magic ink each turn, meaning the game does require a fair bit of thought to solve each puzzle.



PAC-MAN PINBALL ADVANCE 2005

SYSTEM: GBA

Pac-Man and pinball seem like a match made in heaven, so it's a shame that developer Human Soft fumbled it so badly. The core *Pac-Man* ideas are here, but they've been incorporated into two of the dullest-designed tables known to man. There's very little to do on them, while the physics make for some very unrealistic play. All in all, a wasted effort.

PAC 'N ROLL 2005

SYSTEM: DS

Another DS game and another one that tries out some interesting game mechanics with middling results. This time you use your stylus to roll Pac-Man around the well-designed courses, seeking out the pellets that will unlock the gate that lets you progress to the next stage. Okay, so it's effectively very similar to Atari's *Marble Madness*, but the stylus allows for a surprising amount of control over Pac-Man. As an added bonus, the story is genuinely entertaining, pitting our hero against a legendary ghost called Golvis who looks like a punk-rocker and carries an out-of-tune guitar with him.

PAC-MAN WORLD 3 2005

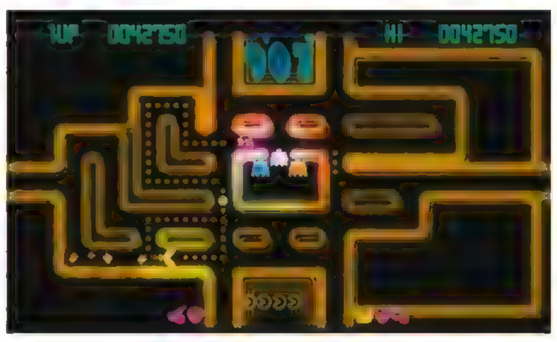
SYSTEM: VARIOUS

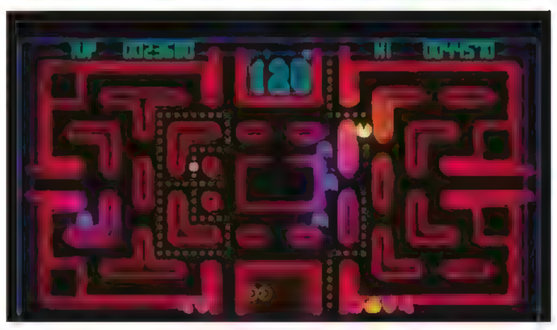
Created to mark *Pac-Man*'s 25th anniversary, *Pac-Man World 3* is unusual in that it wasn't released in Japan. It's surprisingly controversial for a *Pac-Man* game too, because the yellow tyke now speaks and is able to punch enemies in addition to his usual *Pac-Man World* skills (we can only imagine the outrage when he appeared in *Street Fighter X Tekken*). There's a lot more focus on combat than before and it gets repetitive pretty quickly, but there's enough charm and fun design in its levels to keep you playing. The original *Pac-Man* is also included, so you can see just how far Namco's mascot has come. Interestingly, the DS version is noticeably different and very, very buggy.

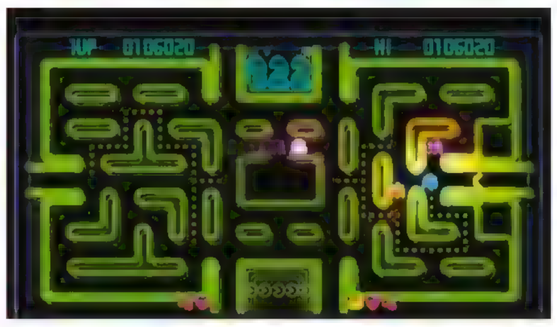
PAC-MAN WORLD RALLY 2006

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Namco waited 14 years to make a *Mario Kart* clone, but it needn't have bothered. Younger gamers will get some mild enjoyment from the cute-looking visuals, but there's plenty to dislike for everyone else looking to try their hand. Tracks are poorly designed, the power-ups are unexciting, while the collision detection feels very ropey. Additional Namco characters get dragged in for the ride and were probably wondering what they did wrong to be punished so.







PAC-MAN CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION 2007

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Toru Iwatani returned to Namco to create what many consider to be the best game in *Pac-Man*'s gaming history. It's a deliciously fast take on the series, featuring far faster-paced gameplay than ever before and cleverly splitting the maze into two halves. Complete one side and an item will spawn on the other, and Pac-Man can then eat that to create the next maze layout. It's a beautifully designed game tailored around high score chasing. There are six modes, but it's the five-minute Championship mode that proves to be the biggest time sink. A sequel added many neat touches, but the original remains our favourite by far.

THE MAN WHO MADE PAC-MAN

Where did the concept of *Pac-Man* originate?

Toru Iwatani: In the late Seventies, videogame arcades, which in Japan we call 'game centres', were just playgrounds for boys, and the only videogames on offer were brutal affairs involving the killing of aliens. My aim was to come up with a game that had an endearing charm, was easy to play, involved lots of light-hearted fun, and that women and couples could enjoy.

Is it true Pac-Man's design was based on a pizza?

TI: With 'eat' established as the key word, a shape caught my eye. I had ordered a round pizza, and it was missing a piece. The shape of what is now Pac-Man flashed through my mind.

Tell us about the ghosts' personalities.

TI: The adversarial TV cartoon *Tom And Jerry* helped shape the relationship between Pac-Man and the ghosts. Had the programming been such that the four ghosts constantly attacked Pac-Man's present location according to the same algorithm, the ghosts would look like a string of beads. Where's the thrill in that? So I introduced AI-type algorithms that had the ghosts coming at Pac-Man from all directions.

Where did the concept of the power pellet originate?

TI: The inspiration for the power pellet was the spinach in the TV cartoon *Popeye*. The power pellets didn't exist in the planning stages at all – they emerged during the development stage as a feature for turning the game around, and made the game vastly more interesting.

How does it feel being behind one of the industry's most famous games?

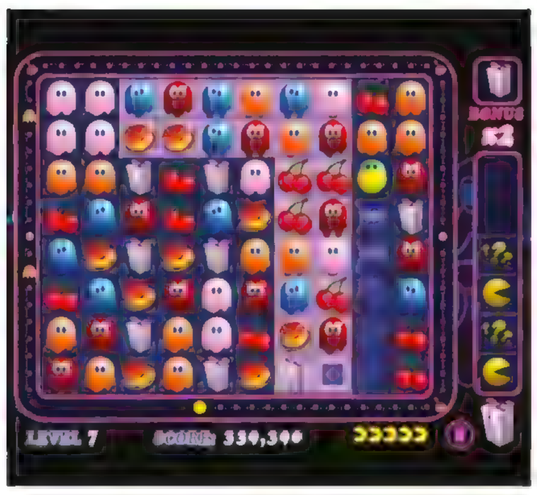
TI: People view the work in different ways, from different viewpoints. Some see it as being broad and shallow. For others, it is narrow yet deep and praised. What is gratifying about this is that people find such different reasons for loving it.

PAC-MAN ARCADE GOLF 2008

SYSTEM: MOBILE

The ball physics in this game are weak and the courses aren't the best designed, but the secret ingredient to this game's success is the large number of mini-games that activate when you hit an arcade machine. As well as being based on *Pac-Man*, there are also tributes to *Galaxian* and *Dig Dug*.

"THE TERM 'PAC-MAN DEFENCE' HAS BEEN USED TO DESCRIBE VARIOUS HOSTILE TAKEOVERS"



PAC-MATCH PARTY 2010

SYSTEM: IOS

In this iOS app, *Pac-Man* steals ideas from yet another popular genre, this time the *Match 3* game. The end result is an okay puzzler that sees you matching ghosts and fruit in a bid to score as many points as possible. You'll occasionally be able to drag power-ups onto the screen (including Pac-Man, who will follow a trail you create, gobbling anything in his way), but other than that it's pretty unexciting stuff. Despite this, it does succeed in being aesthetically pleasing.

PAC-MAN PARTY 2010

SYSTEM: WII, 3DS

Namco takes another stab at *Mario Party*. And again fails miserably. Asteroth and co have buggered off, leaving Pac-Man and his ghostly buddies to run around the poorly designed game boards and compete in a section of naff mini-games that range from rolling up spaghetti to jumping over items on a conveyor belt. Again, smaller gamers will enjoy it, but anyone else is going to find its repetitive mini-games and cumbersome controls too much hassle.

PAC-MAN: CULTURAL ICON EXTRAORDINAIRE

Pac-Man was such a huge success for Namco that he's spawned a huge sideline in merchandising for the Japanese publisher. There was a Hanna Barbara cartoon that ran from 1982-1983, and every possible piece of merchandising you could think of. T-Shirts, lunch boxes, backpacks, mugs, stress balls, clocks, energy drinks, sweets, belt buckles; if there's a way to flog him then Namco will find it.

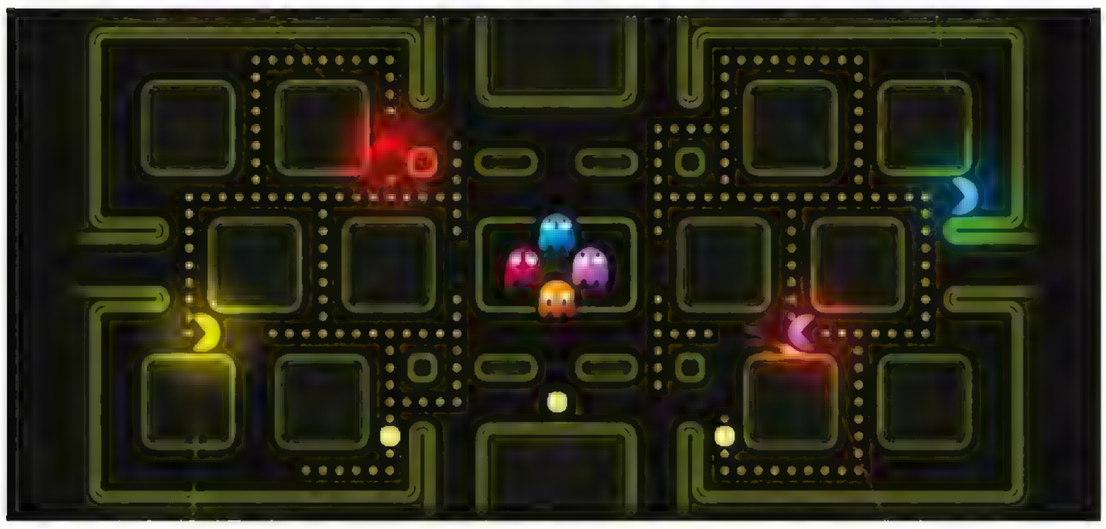
He's been the subject of pinball tables, a fascinating documentary called *Chasing Ghosts*, and has numerous awards in the Guinness World Records. Buckner & Garcia's *Pac-Man Fever* reached number nine on the billboard charts in 1982 and has even caught the attention of parody master "Weird Al" Yankovic.

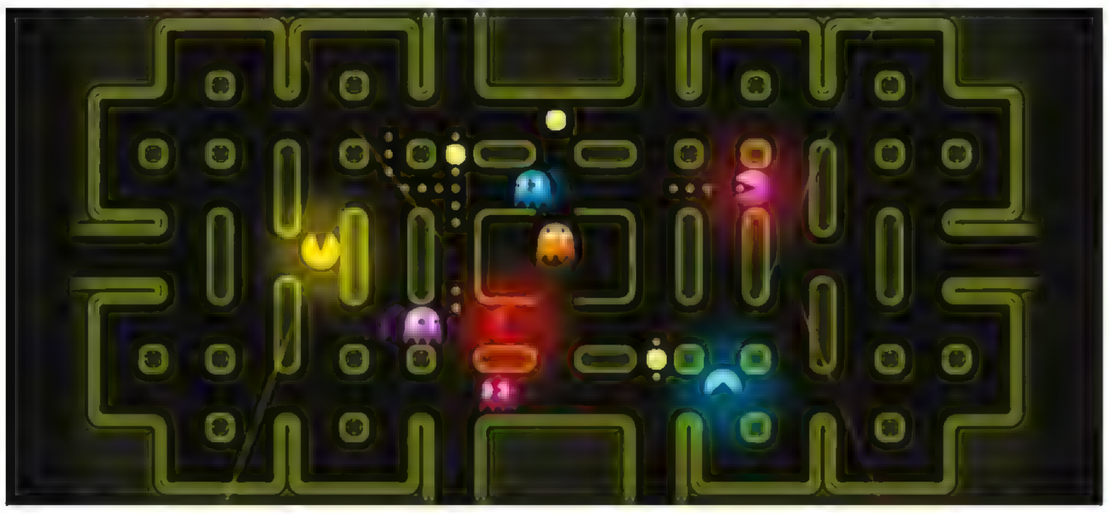
There have been numerous film and TV references, ranging from *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World* to *Wreck-It Ralph* and *Futurama*, while the term 'Pac-Man defence' has been used to describe various hostile takeovers. Over 35 years on and his popularity in today's culture shows no sign of diminishing, with *Pac-Man And The Ghostly Adventures* being the most recent example of his popularity. He's most likely going to outlive us all.

PAC-MAN BATTLE ROYALE 2011

SYSTEM: IOS, ANDROID

Designed to commemorate *Pac-Man*'s 30th anniversary, *Battle Royale* is another superb multiplayer game that proves there's plenty of fresh ideas in the *Pac-Man* formulae. First released in arcades and styled up to look like the Championship games, the focus here is on eliminating the three other Pac-Men. Eating pellets causes fruit to appear, and eating the fruit resets the pellet pattern. A nice touch is that there's always one less power pill than the number of players, meaning games are a frantic dash to get to them first. While it's great fun with other players, it suffers when playing on your own due to its simple AI.





PAC 'N-JUMP 2011

SYSTEM: IOS, ANDROID

Don't be fooled into thinking this is just a clone of *Doodle Jump*. Well it is, but it does enough new stuff to make it feel distinctly different. It's absolutely crammed with references to Namco's past, often turning them into interesting game mechanics. Add in randomly generated levels, great physics and some delightfully retro visuals and *Pac 'N-Jump* becomes an essential download.

PAC-CHOMP! 2011

SYSTEM: IOS

Pac-Chomp is another *Match 3* game, but this time the screen is split into four sections and each section can be rotated individually. While the core gameplay is fun and there's some inventive power-ups (from fans to the traditional Power Pill), the games go on for far too long and soon become boring in anything other than Scramble, which offers a set time limit in which to complete it.

AND THE REST...

Here's the rest of Pac-Man's gaming outings

- **BABY PAC-MAN**
  YEAR: 1982 **SYSTEM:** ARCADE
- **PAC-MAN VR**
  YEAR: 1996 **SYSTEM:** ARCADE
- **PAC-MAN: QUEST FOR THE GOLDEN MAZE**
  YEAR: 2001 **SYSTEM:** PC
- **PAC-MAN WORLD 2**
  YEAR: 2002 **SYSTEM:** VARIOUS
- **PAC-MAN CASINO CARD GAME PACK**
  YEAR: 2003 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **PAC-MAN CASINO SLOTS PACK**
  YEAR: 2003 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **PAC-MAN PINBALL**
  YEAR: 2005 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **PAC-MAN PINBALL 2**
  YEAR: 2008 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **PAC-MAN CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION DX**
  YEAR: 2010 **SYSTEM:** XBOX 360, PS3,PC
- **LETTER LABYRINTH**
  YEAR: 2010 **SYSTEM:** IOS, MOBILE
- **PAC-MAN PUZZLE**
  YEAR: 2010 **SYSTEM:** MOBILE
- **PAC-CHAIN**
  YEAR: 2010 **SYSTEM:** IOS
- **PAC-ATTACK**
  YEAR: 2010 **SYSTEM:** IOS
- **PAC-MAN KART RALLY**
  YEAR: 2012 **SYSTEM:** ANDROID, MOBILE
- **PAC-MAN + TOURNAMENTS**
  YEAR: 2013 **SYSTEM:** ANDROID
- **PAC-MAN MONSTERS**
  YEAR: 2014 **SYSTEM:** ANDROID

PAC-MAN DASH! 2013

SYSTEM: IOS, ANDROID

Pac-Man shows he's hip with the kids by appearing in an annoying free-to-play endless runner. The game itself is decent fun, with Pac-Man running around the varied levels trying to eat as many ghosts as possible. The timed play is extremely annoying, however, as you're often waiting around for quite a while before you can start to play again (unless of course you want to spend cash).

PAC-MAN AND THE GHOSTLY ADVENTURES 2013

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Pac-Man's latest retail release is based on the extremely popular cartoon of the same name. As a result the game is squarely aimed at younger gamers who won't have a problem with its easy difficulty level and by-the-number platform mechanics. Older gamers may still want to investigate, however, because if you can get past the irritating voices, there's a large amount of *Pac-Man* tributes as well as a genuinely enjoyable multiplayer mode. It's not going to win any innovation awards and it's far too easy for its own good, but it remains a fun way to finish off *Pac-Man*'s big-screen legacy.

PAC-MAN CLONES

Unsurprisingly, Pac-Man has spawned plenty of clones...

MOUSE TRAP 1981

SYSTEM: ARCADE

Clever clone that replaces ghosts with cats and Pac-Man with a mouse. Bones will turn you into a dog for a limited time and can be activated whenever you want. Very clever.

LADY BUG 1981

SYSTEM: ARCADE

Excellent clone by Universal which sees you in control of the titular ladybug that has to eat flowers while avoiding spawning insects. It's notable for gates that can temporarily block off enemies.

SNACK ATTACK 1982

SYSTEM: APPLE II

The main character may be a fish and the ghosts have been exchanged for Gumdrop Guards, but there's no mistaking *Snack Attack*'s arcade origins. Developed by Funtastic, a sequel was released later that year.

SNAPPER 1982

SYSTEM: BBC MICRO

Another clone from 1982, this time for the BBC Micro. Developed by Jonathan Griffiths and written in machine code, it's an extremely fast-paced variant that becomes tougher in later stages and had Pac-Man wearing a hat to avoid legal action from Namco.

FANTASY ZONE: THE MAZE 1987

SYSTEM: MASTER SYSTEM

This quirky game strayed away from its original shoot-'em-up gameplay to have all the action take place in various mazes.

FAST FOOD 1989

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

The 8-bit computer character Dizzy thought it would be fun to star in a *Pac-Man* clone. Boy was he mistaken... Painfully slow, dull maze layouts and puny power-ups.

BEHIND THE SCENES

DESTRUCTION DERBY

Time to buckle up and keep your wits about you. Destruction Derby certainly made you drive hard, as makers Martin Edmondson and Robert Troughton explain

Released: 1995
Format: PlayStation, PC, Saturn
Publisher: Psygnosis
Developer: Reflections Interactive

KEY STAFF:
Martin Edmondson: designer and 3D modelling
Robert Troughton: programmer
Michael Troughton: programmer
Elliot Sumner: music and sound effects

"I DEVELOPED A fascination with smashing up cars at an early age," confides Martin Edmondson, relishing a stark memory of what sounds like an eventful youth. He admits it was a rather unhealthy obsession but one born from his father, who would take him to watch real stock car racing, usually in Lancashire where his grandparents lived.

"Between each round I would hop over the fence and run around the cars, examining the damage as they were towed off to be hammered back into shape for the next 'race'," he smiles. "When I was old enough to have a camera, I used to take loads of photos too."

The experience didn't damage him, but it stuck. In 1984, Edmondson founded Reflections Interactive in Newcastle and, five years later, produced *Shadow Of The Beast* for the Amiga to great acclaim. In 1999, he would create the first of a series of games called *Driver*, but in the midst of all that, he took the experience of stock cars – "It was called banger racing in the UK," he says – and drew much inspiration from it.

"I wanted to make a game that was based on smashing cars 'realistically'," he says. "And I had wanted to do this since I became involved in videogame design in the early Eighties. The problem was that no computer or console was capable of doing it effectively, so the idea was something that was put to one side."

When PCs became more advanced and then the PlayStation was launched, it brought with it the moment that allowed Edmondson's idea to become reality. Computers and consoles suddenly had enough power to allow the job to be done, and by this time Edmondson had been speaking with one of his company's programmers, Michael Troughton, about such a project. Together they had begun to come up with concepts and designs.

The thrust of their new game was something they envisaged being called *Demolition Derby*, and the essence of it was to smash cars together and cause maximum damage. It was to be a fast-

■ Blistering races could be had on the tightest of tracks, making for a claustrophobic but fun game.

I DEVELOPED A FASCINATION WITH SMASHING UP CARS AT AN EARLY AGE

■ The key was to crash and crash often, causing some major damage to your opponents.

FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:
SNAGGLETOOTH

◢ *Destruction Derby* was great fun but to me seemed like a rushed job to get out to support the first line of PSone titles. *DD2* to me is the high point of the series. Great fun and it would lend itself well to an HD re-release with online Destruction Bowl and racing.

Posted by:
RADIOFLOYD

◢ *Destruction Derby Raw* was one of my earliest games but I vaguely remember being a bit useless at it. I preferred *Crash Team Racing* and *Speed Freaks*.

Posted by:
RAGNAROTH

◢ *Destruction Derby 2*! That brings back memories. First ever racer and a good racer at that with real damage – such a good feature. Arena mode was excellent. This game is about pure fun. Play it with friends and smash their cars into scrap!!! Brilliant. I'd love to see a new car smash-up with the *Destruction Derby* name.

Posted by:
ANDY KUROSAKI

◢ I loved *Destruction Derby 2* because you could smash cars to oblivion. The actual racing I didn't do much of, to be honest. I preferred finding a narrow piece of track, parking sideways so no one could avoid me, then laughing hysterically when all the other AI cars came piling into me, showering parts all over the place. Good times.

WHAT THEY SAID...

This game succeeds in spite of itself. Glaring faults are forgiven as you bash your way around, the cars denting beyond recognition. Muted applause, please.

Official PlayStation Magazine, Issue 1, November 1995, 7/10

moving racer where the effects of the crashes would be seen in dramatic fashion, with bits flying from the unfolding carnage.

"The gameplay was pretty simple and pandered to my simple desire of smashing up cars – there was little else to the game," he said. "It generated enough fun from that basic mechanic and visual to work as a complete game. Having said that, there was certainly a knack and skill to maximising your points: avoiding damage in certain areas, aiming for the rear quarter on other cars to cause spins and so on."

For the game to work, Edmondson, who became responsible for its design, said the physics had to be spot-on. It was a challenge for the four-man programming team of Russell Lazzari, William Musson and brothers Michael and Robert Troughton. "We had 20 cars crashing and banging into each other," says Robert. "It wasn't an easy task to ensure the physics worked well within an arena like that. We had to increase the traction for the artificial intelligence so that the cars could slide around the track. Much of the work went into perfecting this aspect of the game."

The team used Reflections' proprietary engine in order to gain realistic and predictable results. "Well, obviously we were working within the boundaries of what would be called realistic at that time, but to my mind if the physics weren't right it would be nowhere near as satisfying to smash up the cars and, worse, it would be unpredictable and frustrating to play, a bit like a pool game with bad physics," says Edmondson. "The engine was based on a two-dimensional bounding box collision, and pretty early on we had this up and running and would spend hours just smashing cars into each other for the fun of it with no game."

It was this simple demonstration that got everyone at publisher Psygnosis excited about the game. The Reflections team would fire cars into each other, with cinematic cameras watching the action. "This was so much fun that we were lucky we actually finished programming the game," Edmondson laughs.

As well as capturing the imagination of Psygnosis, the technology demo was also pitched to Sony, who didn't believe Reflections could have it finished within the nine-month deadline it had promised. Sony was sceptical about taking the project on for its new machine, but Edmondson was convinced the planned timescale was appropriate. The only issue it seemed to have was the name. "There was a legal problem with *Demolition Derby* for some reason, so I just coined an alternative called *Demolish 'Em Derby*," Edmondson says.

THIS WAS SO MUCH FUN THAT WE WERE LUCKY WE ACTUALLY FINISHED THE GAME

ONE OF THE early decisions was to always view the cars from their exterior, with no interior camera nor any speedometers, gear-shifting or rear-view mirror to worry about. There was a speedo initially, but it was dropped because the cars maxed out at somewhere in the region of 60mph, rendering it irrelevant, and the emphasis was not on speed anyway. "We certainly weren't setting any miles-per-hour records in the game," says Edmondson. All of this also ensured the focus was placed elsewhere.

"I just felt that for this game, with its focus on fast reactions, simple gameplay and the chaos of the destructive action around you, that manual gear changes would be a step too far for most players," Edmondson explains. "The finer technique of driving and maximising performance wasn't really what the game was about either. There was no rear-view mirror because it hampered performance. Remember we had 20 damage-modelled cars in the scene, all the physics going on, and a track that was

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION

Chase HQ > Destruction Derby > Driver

Destroying a villain's car was the order of the day in Taito's classic coin-op, *Chase HQ*, with players being thrilled when it set alight.

Destruction Derby was all about the crashes. The cinematic cameras and angles inspired *Driver*'s Film Director mode.

A nice close-up as a car smashes into the side of the track followed by other motors.

drawn in its entirety. Rear-view mirrors require the whole scene or at least a simplified second version of it to be re-rendered from a new viewport, so it would have absolutely killed the frame rate. Almost halved it, in fact."

The game did have its features, however. Although the premise of each session was similar, the approach to them was different. The Bowl, for instance, would see you compete against 19 others in one major arena. "It caused us problems, though," says Robert. "There were so many cars, collisions and bits flying around and the geometry was complex. It was hard to get the frame rate right, especially if lots of cars hit you at once. We also had to get the cars to drive intelligently when their steering was smashed, when they could only turn in one direction, and so on."

Stock Car Racing was more traditional than the Bowl in that you were earning points for a final finishing position. Wreckin' Racing took that idea but added more points for causing damage, destruction, spins and so on.

"With Wreckin' Racing, you could actually 'win' by coming third or fourth over the line but having earned more points than the first across the line by causing damage," says Edmondson. "This was called spin and roll in the old days of real banger racing and we included it to satisfy different players' moods and the experience they were looking for. If you just wanted a straight race you could have that, for instance."

For all of its chaos, there were some simple AI rules. Strike the rear quarter of a car and it would cause a spin. Reverse ramming a motor would be effective if the damage on the front was dangerously high. "My favourite mode in the Bowl was called 'it', where we had every one of the other 19 cars heading for you," says Edmondson. "Now that was chaos. The one problem I can remember was if all 20 cars effectively collided at once they would try and push through each other's collision boxes and that would also be a big drain on the physics engine."

With two months to go before the nine-month deadline was up, work was progressing well and Sony snapped up the game for its PSone launch. Edmondson felt the name *Demolish 'Em Derby* was more complicated than it needed to be, and because, in America, such motorsports tend to be called destruction derbies, the name was changed again. It became known as *Destruction Derby*.

NOT EVERYTHING IN the game made the cut: a level editor was dropped due to lack of time. "The game was built on an eight-by-eight grid, which didn't give us much estate to play with," says Robert. "We really limited ourselves as to what we could do with the tracks, so small and large corners, crossovers and straights were pretty much it."

But despite the uncharted waters and the time frame, the team enjoyed working on the PlayStation. "It was a really nice machine to program for since it was so simple, relatively speaking, and the tools were pretty good," says Edmondson. "And when you look back, it was nothing like the nightmares that the PS2 and PS3 turned out to be from an ease of programming standpoint. So actually we had things up and running pretty quickly, with the whole game delivered in something like eight admittedly very intensive months from delivery of the dev kits to the game being finished. The speed and the responsiveness was down to a high frame rate of 30Hz and just a pretty responsive – some might say twitchy – driving engine. We had to spend a lot of time on optimisation, actually, to maintain the high frame rate, but this was absolutely vital to the feel of the game and the feeling of satisfaction from the collisions."

ROBERT TROUGHTON
Programmer

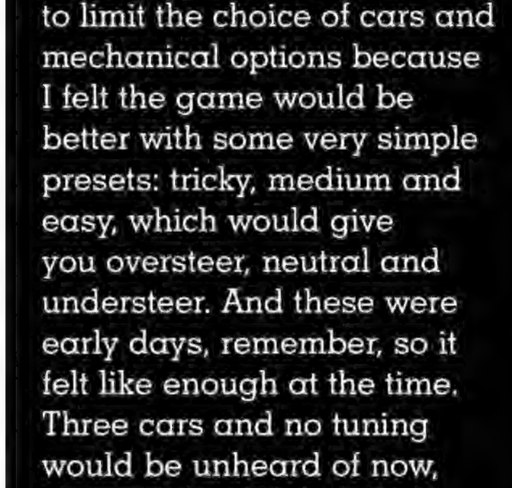
The game was well received on release. **Play** magazine covered *Destruction Derby* in its first issue and awarded it 86%. Lee Buchanan, a reviewer for *PC Gamer*, said the game was "a wild dose of racing madness, with enough wrecks, smoke and squealing tyres to satisfy the demon driver that lurks inside all of us".

None of this surprised Edmondson, whose team went on to make *Destruction Derby 2* (1996), *Destruction Derby 64* (N64, 1999), *Destruction Derby Raw* (PSone, 2000) and *Destruction Derby Arenas* (PS2, 2004). "We had an early idea that the game would be received well since we had demonstrated it in early form to so many people and that was the reaction we were getting," he explains. "This was helped, of course, by the buzz around the launch of PlayStation and the fact that the whole experience of fast 3D games were new to many people outside of the arcade. It was still really exciting, though, getting the final game into people's hands and seeing people enjoy it so much, and it's nice to still be answering interview questions about the game after all these years."

Bumper to bumper

THE ACTION of *Destruction Derby* was made even more frenetic thanks to the claustrophobic nature of the track designs. Edmondson wanted a high density of cars and, given that 20 was the highest comfortable number possible due to the practical limits of the hardware, there had to be a way of ensuring it all ran smoothly. By making the tracks narrow, slippery and bordered with walls, the challenge was set.

"We could avoid scenery popping using our method but really the reason for the tight tracks was to cram the cars together for as much action and destruction as possible," says Edmondson. "I wanted this chaotic and at times almost claustrophobic feeling of being surrounded by that chaos. I also wanted to limit the choice of cars and mechanical options because I felt the game would be better with some very simple presets: tricky, medium and easy, which would give you oversteer, neutral and understeer. And these were early days, remember, so it felt like enough at the time. Three cars and no tuning would be unheard of now, I guess, but back then it kept things simple and delivered a consistent experience for the player. Also remember we had eight or nine months or so to go from dev kit delivery to finished game, so some things we just couldn't even consider."



Martin Edmondson is back at Reflections, now under the Ubisoft banner.

WHY I ♥...

Micro Machines

DAVID DARLING, KWALEE

My favourite game of all time would be Micro Machines. *We had a lot of fun while developing it, and it's one of those games that you can enjoy with lots of people in the same room. If you look on Wikipedia it's listed under party games in general, because it's a game that people enjoy playing together in groups. It's a very sociable game, and people have a lot of fun when playing it. You're constantly competing with your friends during races because of the way the camera would follow all the racers on the screen and reset them behind the group if you happen to die or fall off the track.*

"If you look on Wikipedia, it's listed under party games in general, because it's a game that people enjoy playing together in groups"

DAVID DARLING, KWALEE

GAME CHANGERS

METAL GEAR SOLID

Released: 1998 (Japan, US), 1999 (UK) **Publisher:** Konami
Developer: KCEJ **System:** PlayStation

Metal Gear Solid has sold 6 million copies, which was surpassed by *Metal Gear Solid 2*'s 7 million when it was released back in 2001

Kojima created the modern stealth genre with this influential cyber thriller, as well as introducing the iconic Solid Snake to audiences worldwide...

KOJIMA'S 3D TRANSLATION of his MSX *Metal Gear* series was a landmark game due to its details and depth. You can see this in the way it was initially promoted during E3 1997: displays of Snake blowing up guards with about 20 consecutive C4 bombs, figuring out snowy land masses through the scope and machine-gunning an invisible cyborg ninja while office debris flies through the air. It's this extra dimension to design that makes *Metal Gear Solid* such a significant part of the history of our medium – this was the birth of the modern stealth genre in all its details, all its possibilities in approaching situations however you liked.

For many players, *Metal Gear Solid* was a shock to the system in that Snake's shooting and basic action abilities were just alternative paths in the game – instead, sneaking around was the point. Stealth is something players had to mentally adjust to. That first scenario, when Snake is waiting for the elevator after crawling out of the water, is a brilliantly disguised tutorial. Approach it with open fists and you realise that enemies don't die after they're knocked over. You have no guns, and once the alarm goes off, that's pretty much it for you.

Then you learn to be quiet. You learn how to choke enemies without accidentally throwing them with the square button, you learn not to tread through the water on your way past guards and, crucially, you learn to wait. And, once you've grasped these fundamentals, you get good at everything else in *Metal Gear Solid*, too, including the combat. Understanding how to use everything in Snake's inventory, like the scope, claymore mines and rations enables you to look at every environment laterally, like a puzzle with many solutions, and be rewarded by the intricacy of the way you tackle the situation.

It's still arguably Kojima's most engaging piece of work, on a par with *MGS3* and far outstripping *Sons Of Liberty* as well as, to a lesser extent, *Guns Of The Patriots*. Each *Metal Gear Solid* game is an escalating journey from A to B, fraught with the madness of a gauntlet of boss fights along the way, increasingly bizarre environments and the promise of an unpredictable climax. *Metal Gear*'s boss fights are the best in the field, frankly. In *MGS*, Kojima took the time to underline the menace of each one.

They all have their own angle on insanity; Revolver Ocelot opts for a gun duel in a close-quarters C4

THE STORY OF MGS: IN BRIEF

WE ENDEAVOUR TO SUM UP KOJIMA'S CRAZY SERIES IN ONE BOXOUT

METAL GEAR SOLID

★ Big Boss clone Solid Snake is sent to stop Liquid, who's holding the US hostage. Snake tries to rescue people from Liquid's FOXHOUND unit but they die. Snake eliminates FOXHOUND one-by-one, saves Meryl and Otacon, destroys the robot Metal Gear then beats Liquid.

METAL GEAR SOLID 2

★ Snake finds out the US has built a Metal Gear, which Ocelot steals. Jump forward, and Raiden is looking to stop Solidus Snake. The game has been an attempt by the Patriots to recreate the circumstances of Shadow Moses with Raiden in place of Snake.

METAL GEAR SOLID 3

★ Big Boss (Naked Snake) is dispatched to rescue a scientist. His mentor, The Boss, betrays him and defects to the USSR. Snake is sent to kill her, before the truth about the manipulation of The Boss and betrayal by love interest EVA lead to the greatest videogame ending of all time.

METAL GEAR SOLID 4

★ Snake is old. The world is the subject of a war economy controlled by Liquid Ocelot and presided over by the Patriots. Raiden is a robot ninja. Big Boss turns up. Meryl marries Johnny Sasaki. Raiden's child is the Milkybar Kid. The ending is too long. Snake wins and has an iPod.

METAL GEAR SOLID V

★ Kojima's last and, arguably, best *MGS*, *V* is made up of *Ground Zeroes* and *The Phantom Pain*, and transports us back to before the original *Metal Gear*. More mental storylines and truly open-world experiences for both new and old *MGS* fans.

trap, Psycho Mantis infiltrates the mind of love interest Meryl and puts a gun against her head to manipulate Snake, Gray Fox brutally murders soldiers at random, Vulcan Raven cruises around in a tank and Sniper Wolf spends entire days picking out her targets. Then there's the main villain: Liquid Snake. A clone of Big Boss like Solid Snake himself and therefore his genetic equal, despite having an inexplicable bizarre British-American accent and a blonde mullet. They're innovative in appearance, thanks to Yoji Shinkawa's character designs, as well as grotesquely charismatic in their portrayal.

THEY'RE THE MAIN event in *Metal Gear Solid*, each framed with this mythical feeling of threat, like each comes preloaded with their own torrid histories that have shaped them into these chaotic figures. They all feel like they belong in Shadow Moses, this foreign-feeling icy kingdom of madness. It's become tiresomely popular to slate Hideo Kojima's use of cut-scenes, but the way bosses are presented in *MGS* is convincingly cinematic, right down to their names appearing on-screen with the actor's in brackets.

And that's the other component of *Metal Gear Solid*'s DNA, the one that is often knocked and rarely applauded when it's good: the influence of cinema.

IT'S STILL KOJIMA'S MOST ENGAGING PIECE OF WORK, ON A PAR WITH METAL GEAR SOLID 3

KEY FACTS

- *Metal Gear Solid* topped the United Kingdom charts for eight weeks when it was originally released in 1999, which was a record at the time.
- One of the only games in the series to get a PC port – and actually quite a good one – *Metal Gear* found its way to Windows in late 2000 and works on Windows 7, though it's not available on Steam or GOG.
- *Metal Gear Solid* was remade as *The Twin Snakes* in 2003 by Silicon Knights, but the developer fluffed it a bit by changing the music and rerecording the voice acting. But it did look nice.

Yes, it's full of cut-scenes, but the vast majority are good cut-scenes, elevated by a fairly well-translated script and a superb voice cast who were far and above the industry standard at the climax of the CD-ROM age. The story was full of silly bits but there was conviction in the way it was presented, with David Hayter's dramatic gruff interpretation of Snake making him one of the first videogame characters to instantly be known on voice alone.

Just like the stealth mechanics, this cinematic presentation felt new to people. That Kojima handled it so well was expected after such a broad sweep of hype prior to the game's release, and the narrative became intrinsic to the reveal of whatever challenges the player would face next, including the aforementioned bosses. It was by no means the first title to achieve this (Westwood's *Blade Runner* was perhaps even more revolutionary with mo-cap in 1997), but for many of the six million gamers who hadn't seen videogames convincingly brush with motion pictures, this would be a watershed moment.

That's just one part of why *Metal Gear Solid* holds up today, in fact, much better than its flawed successor, bogged down as it is by adolescent conspiracy nonsense and a truncated narrative. The rebirth of the stealth genre prompted by *MGS*, a feat shared with *Thief: The Dark Project*, led to the rise (and eventual fall) of *Splinter Cell* and *Metal Gear*'s own progression in its later instalments, as well as the proliferation of this genre's mechanics in every game from *GTA* to *Tomb Raider*. Hideo Kojima, meanwhile, became one of the industry's leading lights and the kind of public figure where people would pay attention to absolutely everything he had to say. *Metal Gear Solid* is a worthy success story, a game that remains very easy to fall in love with.

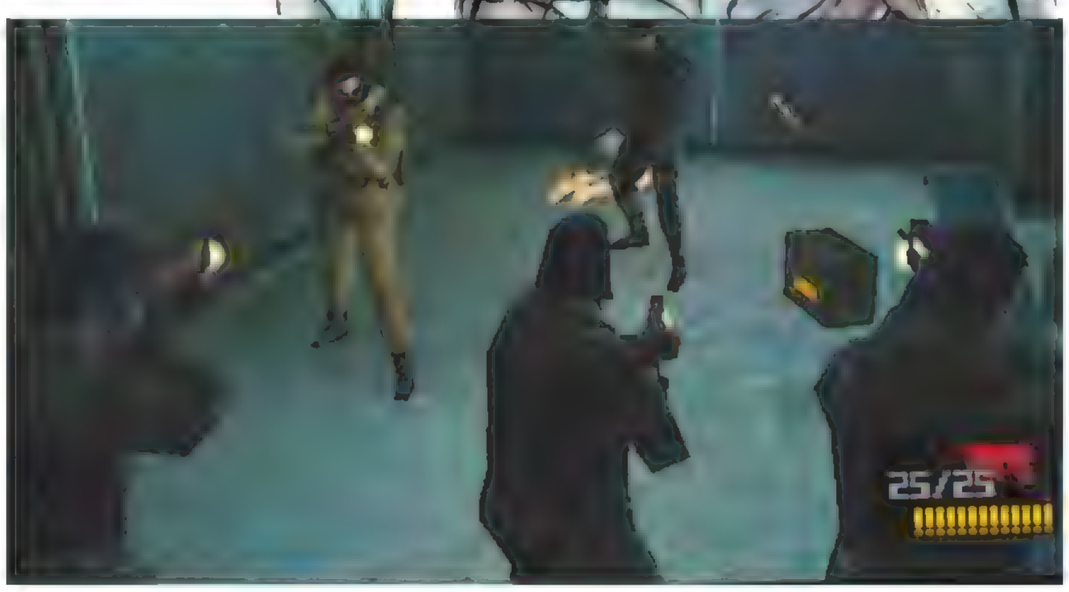
GAME CHANGERS

TEN EXAMPLES OF MAD GENIUS IN METAL GEAR SOLID

THOSE MOMENTS AND IDEAS THAT DEFINED KOJIMA'S PLAYSTATION ORIGINAL, FOR BETTER OR WORSE

"NEITHER ENEMY NOR FRIEND"

"I'VE COME FROM another world to do battle with you." The depiction of Gray Fox, Snake's former ally turned resuscitated villain (then ally again) Frank Jaeger is one of the more interesting parts of the game's story due to the character's moral ambiguity, connections to Snake, horrific murder of soldiers in a corridor and redemptive finale. Yoji Shinkawa's skeletal design of this cyborg ninja is one of the most iconic created for a videogame.



MERYL – LOVE INTEREST OR NOT?

MERYL WAS THE token love interest who played the most bizarre role in the story – just why was she in Shadow Moses to begin with? Based on a character of the same name and appearance from Kojima's earlier title *Snatcher*, which came out more than a decade before *MGS*, Meryl flirts a bit with Snake, but her eventual fate in *Metal Gear Solid 4* sort of implies it was only ever a deepened friendship.

OTACON AND SNAKE'S FRIENDSHIP

SNAKE'S ODD RELATIONSHIP with Otacon is one of the unusual highlights of *Metal Gear Solid*: super soldier meets otaku, and what is at first a useful alliance soon turns into a lifelong friendship. Snake's interactions with his allies are all pretty entertaining in *Metal Gear Solid*, yet Otacon brings out a lighter side of Snake that really helps differentiate him from forgettable one-note videogame action heroes.

MULTIPLE ENDINGS, VIA TORTURE

A FORWARD-LOOKING IDEA, failing to resist Revolver Ocelot's torture at around the game's mid-point results in the actually quite nasty consequence of Meryl's death, which changes the ending to Snake escaping Shadow Moses with Otacon instead of Meryl. Multiple endings wouldn't be revisited in subsequent entries despite the success of the idea in *MGS* – so just what was Kojima thinking?

"YOU'VE GOT A GREAT BUTT"

A LUDICROUS AND cheeky bit of vague sexism from Snake that represents the scripting problems of *Metal Gear Solid*, which are about as numerous as its successes. This Eighties action movie bit of trash dialogue is about as bad as it gets, and given that Snake himself was generally pretty respectful to female characters in the sequels, this was a one-off.

BACK OF THE CD CASE

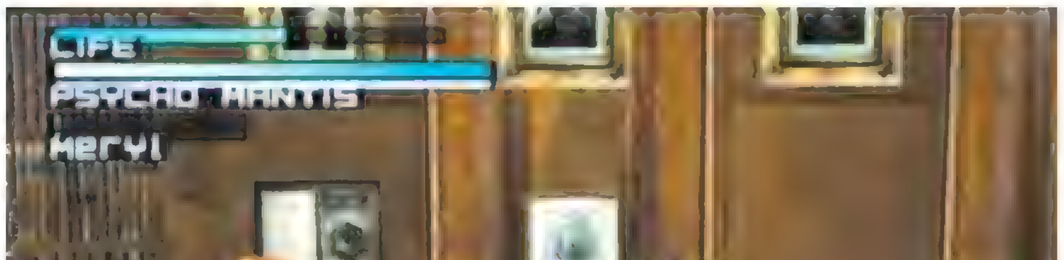
EVERYONE KNOWS THIS one and every outlet in history has referenced it to the point of *FFVII*/Aeris' death nightmare fatigue, so it's barely worth talking about. Instead we'll share an anecdote: one writer on this bookazine fell foul of the CD case codec idea by playing a pirated version owned by their cousin, using a bad photocopy to work it out. Piracy never wins, kids.

METAL GEAR ITSELF

THE BEAUTY OF the *Metal Gear* franchise is that, while primarily about the idea of war, espionage and military action, the imagery of the franchise is anything but boring realism. Metal Gear REX is a walking nuclear robot – it's a mech by any other name, pretty much, and as was the case in *Metal Gear* and subsequent games in the series, this is a tenet of the franchise.

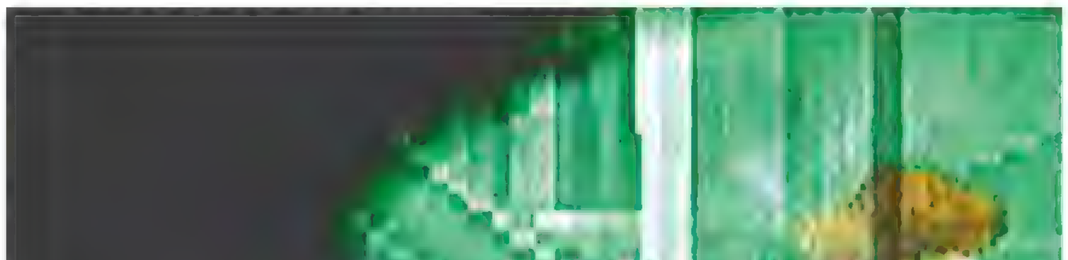
THE FINAL BATTLE IS A FISTFIGHT

DESPITE SOLID SNAKE being armed to the teeth with all the Stinger and Nikita missiles he'll ever need, the last encounter with Liquid Snake, on top of Metal Gear REX, is an elaborate pub fight – a winning creative choice. The designers know it's more intimate, a raw way to determine the outcome of the story, for players to really feel like Snake earns his superiority in the most cathartic way possible.



PSYCHO MANTIS

AGAIN, LIKE THE CD case idea, the fourth wall nature of this has been discussed to death, so let's focus on the portrayal of Mantis himself. The black skeletal vest, the scorched-looking skin, the gas mask and the strained delivery of his dialogue – this is as close to a horror villain that *MGS* has, a puppet master who manipulates Meryl's actions and makes the player feel more helpless than they would against a bipedal nuclear robot.



SNIPER WOLF

CATACLYSMIC MELODRAMA AS Otacon mourns the death of a boss who tore a bullet through Meryl's stomach and therefore made you backtrack to almost the start of the game. Otacon's blubbing and the howling of an actual wolf are the worst offenders for cut-scene nonsense, though the gigantic field setting of the battle is fantastic, and returning to it in *Guns Of The Patriots* to fight Crying Wolf was a real treat.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...

DONKEY KONG

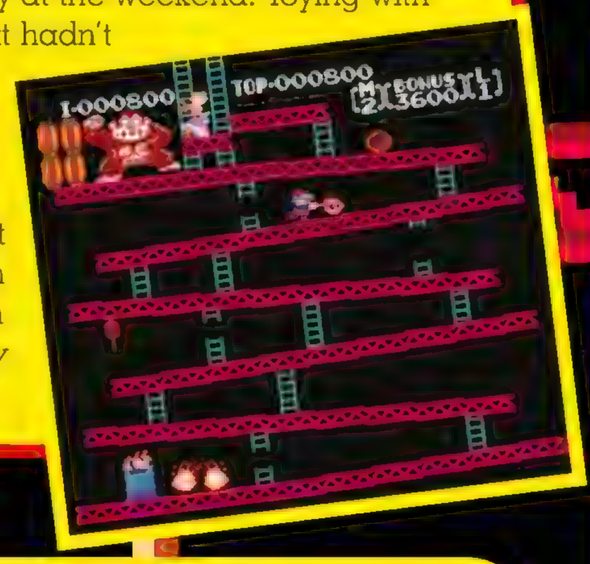
Almost as recognisable and iconic as Mario himself, Donkey Kong has evolved over the years from popular arcade fodder to critically acclaimed platformer. We look back at over 35 years of the Kong

***Donkey Kong* is legendary.** It's one thing to be recognisable within any medium, but to reach such heights with casual and hardcore gamers alike, not to mention inspire a documentary on the subject, is a level of success that must have surprised even Miyamoto himself. From such humble beginnings as an admired arcade machine, *Donkey Kong* has stayed viable and interesting thanks to its ever-changing template. From embracing the ways of the platformer to trying its hand at rhythm-action, the franchise is nothing if not diverse. Incredibly, the power of the mascot proved it could overcome any challenge, even taking on Mario at his own karting game and, for many, taking the crown. It's been a long journey...

1981

DONKEY KONG

DESIGNED BY a young up-and-comer called Shigeru Miyamoto and greenlit due to Nintendo's desire to break into the West, the original *Donkey Kong* was more than just an addictive way to spend your money at the weekend. Toying with visuals and cut-scenes in ways that hadn't been done before in gaming and tying them directly into the plot – a painstakingly simple one, obviously – it also gave birth to Jumpman, aka Mario. Bizarrely, if it wasn't for the relationship between Bluto, Olive Oyl and Popeye, which heavily inspired Miyamoto, *Donkey Kong* may have never existed.



1982

DONKEY KONG JR

BUILDING ON what had made the previous game such a success, *Donkey Kong Jr*'s most interesting dynamic is portraying Mario as a villain. With the giant gorilla caged by the Italian, it's up to his son to try to save him, dodging a similar array of obstacles to those that were introduced a year earlier. The differences came in much faster gameplay, a wider array of ways to get to the top of each screen, the introduction of new enemies, and fiddling with the format so each level was slightly altered.

1983

DONKEY KONG 3

DRAMATICALLY TRANSFORMED from its predecessors, *Donkey Kong 3* burst onto the scene with plenty of raised eyebrows in tow. Leaving behind its platforming roots to embrace the ways of a shooter, Stanley – replacing Mario – has to keep Kong away from his greenhouse by blasting him with bullets until he's pushed off the screen. It was far less engaging and enjoyable than the past two entries, a rare occasion where Nintendo's attempt to breathe some life into a franchise didn't go to plan. Repetitive, rigid and not anywhere near as successful, *Donkey Kong 3* remains a flaw on DK's record.

1983

DONKEY KONG JR MATH

RELEASED ON the NES in the midst of *Donkey Kong*'s initial success, Nintendo's desire to release constant content resulted in the edutainment game, *Donkey Kong Jr Math*. It was laughably poor, asking players to traverse a traditional *DK* level, answering mathematically focused questions on the way. Not only was it a nightmare to control – everything felt like a struggle – but it just wasn't very fun, questions being far too easy even for the youngest of gamers. It bombed to such a degree that Nintendo soon changed its mind on the entire genre.

1994

DONKEY KONG

NINTENDO MAY have taken its time to get *Donkey Kong* back on the scene, but when it did, it kept things exceptionally simple and, of all things, focused on the Game Boy. Starting with the opening levels from the arcade debut, the game turned into a beast of a portable title with an additional 97 stages. Admittedly there weren't any sweeping changes to be discovered – this was *Donkey Kong* made for on-the-go play – but it did the job in satisfying an insatiable urge that many gamers had developed.

1994

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

THE FIRST *Donkey Kong* game not to involve Miyamoto, Rare's *Donkey Kong Country* cemented the franchise's dominance when it debuted on the SNES. Radically evolving the platforming ideals from the Eighties, the side-scrolling *Country* tasked you with the simple aim of recovering DK's bananas, taken from him by the evil Kremlings. As well as constantly toying with the format – Rare took the gorilla swimming, swinging and mine-carting through 40 different levels – Donkey Kong's family was introduced to the public, meaning a second player could take control of a fresh-faced Diddy Kong to roam through the game co-operatively. Rather than just ticks on the back of a box to satisfy marketing execs, it was an experience well-deserving of its praise, inspiring countless copycats and also-rans.

1995

DONKEY KONG LAND

CREATED BY Rare and apparently inspired by its success found on the SNES with *Donkey Kong Country*, *Donkey Kong Land* was a watered down version for the Game Boy. Smartly done and only cutting corners where it felt it had to, Rare's spark remained as its latest *DK* outing was fairly charming and warmly received.

1996

DONKEY KONG LAND 2

RARE CLEARLY realised that it had struck upon a plan that worked, so *Donkey Kong Land 2* once again peeked over at what was happening on the Super Nintendo and tweaked it accordingly for the Game Boy. It may have lacked the scope of its console brother, but it took advantage of the handheld fantastically.

1997

DONKEY KONG LAND III

FOLLOWING ON from the approach of the first two, *Donkey Kong Land III* ensured that Rare ended its trilogy of handheld hits on a high too. The straightforward method of shrinking everything down for the small screen returned, and it's a testament to the developer that it managed to make this work on both the home and portable consoles.

1995

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2: DIDDY KONG'S QUEST

STILL RIDING on the wave of praise from the previous year, Rare returned to the SNES 12 months later with a much-anticipated follow-up. Another Kong, Dixie, was added to the mix, as the returning Diddy and his girlfriend tried to save Donkey from Kaptain K Rool. Diddy and Dixie deliberately played differently from one another in order to give a greater sense of character. Although it was clear this followed in its forerunner's footsteps, the many tweaks and progressive difficulty meant, in record time, Nintendo had another hit on its hands as *Diddy Kong's Quest* went on to sell over 4 million copies.

1996

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 3: DIXIE KONG'S DOUBLE TROUBLE!

PROVING THAT today's sequel model isn't actually all that new, 1996 signalled the arrival of the third *Donkey Kong Country* game in as many years. Seemingly obsessed with bizarrely named characters, Rare brought back Dixie along with Kiddy Kong to track down Donkey and Diddy, who had gone missing. Co-op was again pushed to be more dynamic, as was the game's map, enabling you for the first time to go off the beaten path. It ended up with lower scores and sales but capped what is a fantastic trilogy.

1997

DIDDY KONG RACING

SEEMINGLY HAPPY with forgoing sleep, Rare shocked the world in 1997 when *Diddy Kong Racing* arrived. Not only did it sacrifice the franchise's lead in favour of his nephew, but the choice of genre put it in direct competition with *Mario Kart*, a game often imitated but never bettered. Imagine everyone's surprise, then, when *Diddy Kong Racing* was good, and pinched Mario's crown off his head. Brilliantly building a hub world into an oddly entertaining narrative, it even boasted boss races and took you into the skies and water.

GAME & WATCH

Behold the king...

Donkey Kong

Released: **1982**

A more simplified port of the arcade game that took place across the Game & Watch's two screens. The twist came with, of all things, a set of pegs. Once unhooked, Donkey Kong fell to his demise.

Donkey Kong Jr

Released: **1982**

Much like *Donkey Kong*, Nintendo simply took the idea of *DK Jr* and found a way to make it work on the Game & Watch. Sticking with the same storyline as the coin-op, it made a comeback in 1998 as a part of the Mini-Classics series.

1999

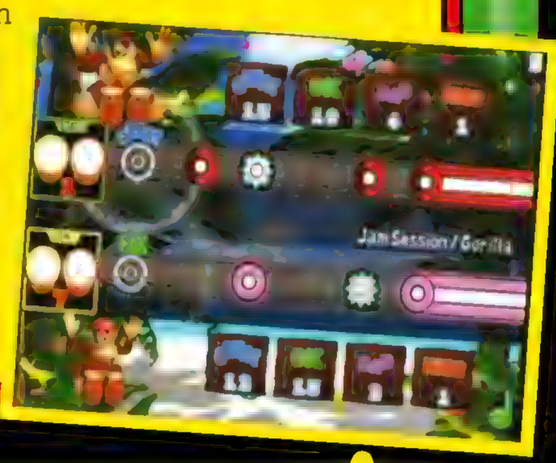
DONKEY KONG 64

CONTROVERSIAL FROM the off as it had the dubious task of being the first game to require the N64 Expansion Pak, *Donkey Kong 64* took the concepts that had made the SNES entries so popular and tried to repackage them on Nintendo's new console. Realising how well *Mario 64* had been received, Rare put its unique stamp on the game thanks to an enlarged pool of characters, with five Kongs to choose from. As each had their own set of moves, abilities and collectables, *DK64* had a staggering amount of replayability, not to mention a multiplayer mode. While the latter was a little hit and miss, it was yet another hit from Rare.

2003

DONKEY KONGA

THERE ARE some truly obscure titles on the GameCube, *Donkey Konga* being one of them. Despite finding its fair share of popularity, a rhythm-action game co-developed by Namco was surely an entry no one could have predicted when the gorilla debuted back in the early Eighties. Packaged with two bongo controllers, enabling you to smack each in time with the music, the absurdity of the project continued with the track listing – the likes of Queen's *We Will Rock You* happily sitting alongside the theme from *Zelda*. Despite all this madness, *Donkey Konga* was a pleasure, even picking up an award for innovation along the way.



2004

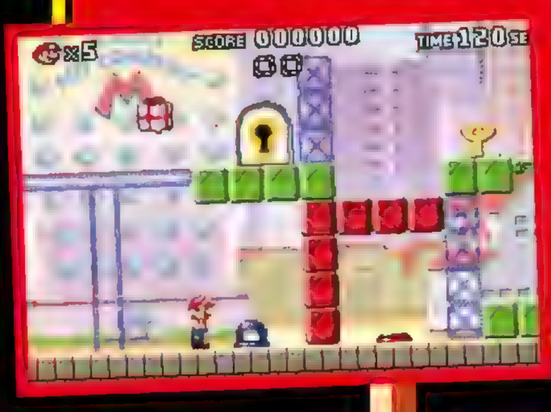
DONKEY KONGA 2

NINTENDO SENSED a need to unleash more bongo-hitting joy into people's lives, so 2004 saw a *Donkey Konga* sequel released to little fanfare. Retaining all the elements of before, its only real reason for existing was to offer more tracks, proof that there was a time when DLC was not the all-encompassing monster it is today.

2004

MARIO VS DONKEY KONG

TAKING THE elements that had brought them both into the public eye and then throwing some puzzle elements in means *Mario vs Donkey Kong* remains an intriguing Game Boy Advance title to this day. Rather than avoiding barrels, the plumber had to avoid a number of more free-flowing obstacles in order to get his hands on a specific item, the collecting of which would then unlock the next. It was a natural evolution of the *DK* concept, but it wasn't until 2006 when this became something so much more…



2005

DK: KING OF SWING

THIS DIVISIVE entry in *Donkey Kong*'s legacy almost seemed like Nintendo's attempt to recapture the simple and intuitive nature that brought the series to prominence in the first place. In many ways, this was achieved, with Donkey Kong being asked to swing around specific pegs in order to get to his goal as numerous obstructions threatened to derail our hero. It was fine but heavily overlooked: when was the last time you heard anyone mention it?

2005

DONKEY KONG: JUNGLE BEAT

REALISING THAT letting the bongo controllers simply die was not an option, Nintendo found a way to take them and adapt the concept into a platformer. Hammering the left and right drum would move Donkey Kong, a swift smack of both seeing him jump into the air. It resulted in a unique and compelling experience, polished off excellently with a layer of depth that revealed further secrets the more you experimented. It more recently bounced back into view thanks to a Wii release.

Donkey Kong II
Released: **1983**

With the limitations of the hardware making it difficult to do anything intricate, *Donkey Kong II* was forced to be basic, in this case getting DK Jr to use a key to unlock four different chains that held the now-famous gorilla hostage.

Donkey Kong Circus
Released: **1984**

One of the few Game & Watch titles to feature full colour. *Donkey Kong Circus*, once again, experimented in bizarre ways. As DK dances on a barrel while Mario watches, the gorilla has to juggle pineapples by skipping across the screen.

Donkey Kong Hockey
Released: **1984**

Nintendo, in 1984, decided the best way for Mario and Donkey Kong to settle their differences was over a game of hockey. The real twist was multiplayer play thanks to two controllers hidden in the back of the hardware itself.

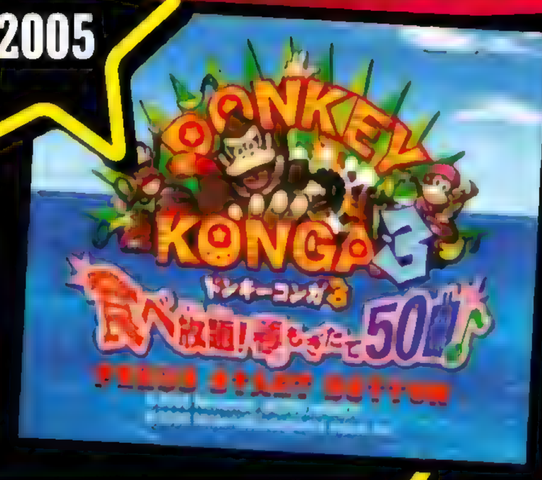
2005

DONKEY KONG: JUNGLE FEVER

FOR ONE of the latest *Donkey Kong* games to be released in the arcades, Nintendo relinquished control over to Capcom and a successor to the GameCube's *Jungle Beat* was born. In the same vein as the insanely popular pachinko games, it's the only *Donkey Kong* game to use a medal-based system. Borrowing many of the same mechanics as the 2004 release, it never saw release outside Japan.

2005

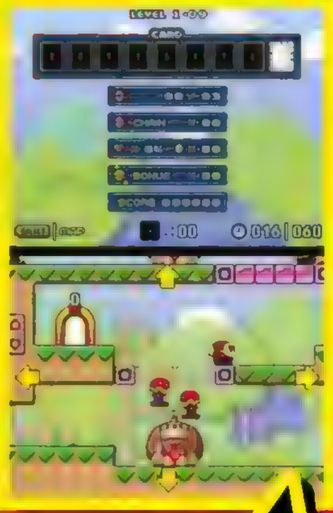
DONKEY KONGA 3: TABE-HOUDAI! HARU MOGITATE 50 KYOKU



THIS JAPAN-ONLY third *Donkey Konga* game once again kept its basics intact, instead focusing on its song list, which consisted of 57 tracks. Its spice came in the form of 21 tunes from the NES.

2006

MARIO VS DONKEY KONG 2: MARCH OF THE MINIS



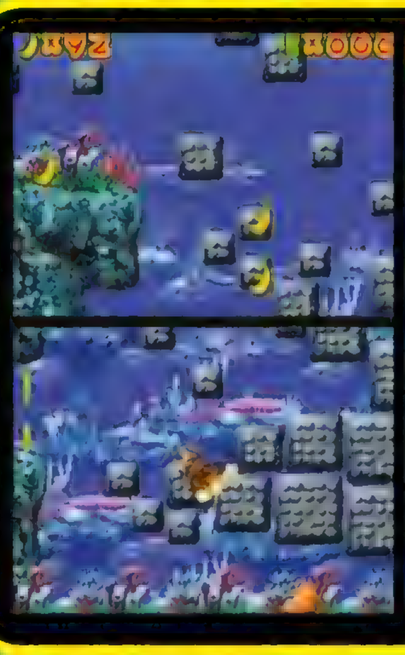
THIS SEQUEL to the 2004 original is, for many, the true standout of this spin-off series thanks to its ingenious use of the DS touch screen and *Lemmings*-inspired ways. With the simple goal of getting a group of mini, robotic Marios to the end of the level, the puzzles put in place require such patience and expert timing that even the most hardened gamer will appreciate the challenge. An underrated gem.

2006

DONKEY KONG: BANANA KINGDOM

RESIDING IN Japan only and another addition to the *Donkey Kong: Jungle Fever* line. Capcom stuck strictly to its formula, iterating rather than changing what it clearly deemed to be a winning idea. Don't expect to see this in the West any time soon.

2007



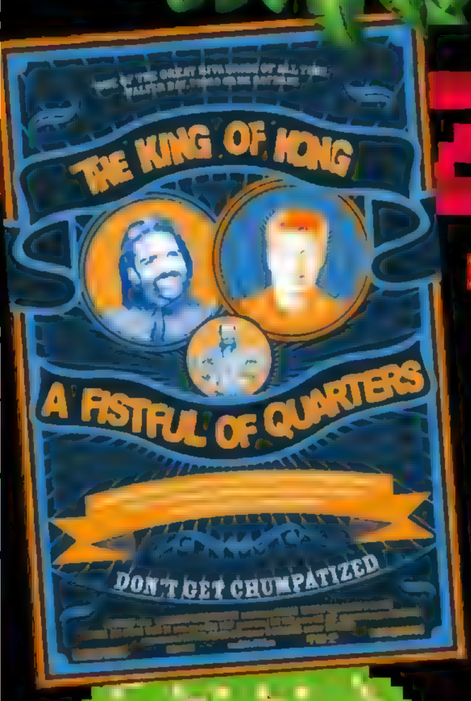
DK: JUNGLE CLIMBER

THIS SEQUEL to *DK: King Of Swing* was never going to light up the planet, and the DS's *Jungle Climber* was a disappointment, mostly due to it essentially reworking the idea. While this version was far superior, the peg-based gameplay had lost some of its charm in the three-year interim period, leaving this in the unenviable position of feeling too light to deserve its full-priced outing.

2007

DONKEY KONG: BARREL BLAST

ORIGINALLY DESIGNED for the GameCube, *Barrel Blast* was held off in favour of a Wii release, a move that signalled the end of the bongo peripheral's lifespan. Unfortunately, the Wii Remote and Nunchuk proved to be a poor substitute. Relying on many of the staples that *Mario Kart* had for years, the racing game was a draining experience as both controllers had to be constantly shaken.



THE KING OF KONG

A Fistful Of Quarters

A GAME requires an insanely big fan base to be able to support an entire documentary. And yet, in 2007, Seth Gordon followed the fascinating journey of two gamers fighting for the *Donkey Kong* world record. Whether it was planned or not, Steve Wiebe, the underdog, and Billy Mitchell, a natural antagonist, stepped into their roles perfectly, creating a sense of drama that surely nobody thought was possible from a project that focused on a 30-year-old videogame. It was passionate, though, and the desperate attempts by Weibe to overcome Mitchell felt real. Released to critical acclaim and achieving cult status, *The King Of Kong* is another testament to *DK*'s iconic status.

2007

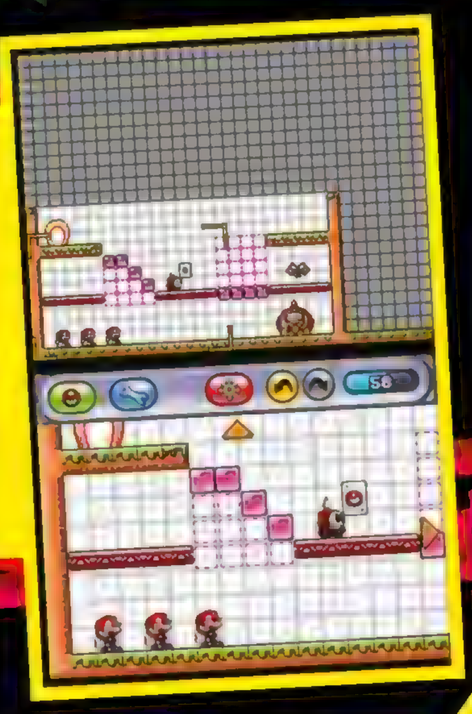
DIDDY KONG RACING DS

A RETURN to the much-loved racing format should have been a momentous occasion in all of videogames but, alas, the DS version of *Diddy Kong Racing* didn't turn out as many had hoped. Although the races, much like a decade ago, were varied and fun with a more than decent online mode, Rare's decision to try to work in the DS's touch screen as much as possible was a poor one that watered down the experience no end.

2009

MARIO VS DONKEY KONG: MINIS MARCH AGAIN!

PUTTING ASIDE the awful title, *Minis March Again!* is a testament to Nintendo DSiWare. Keeping the foundations alive, the sole reason to download this iteration was for the very well-constructed level editor. By opening up the option to both play locally and share across the internet, anyone who had bought into the concept all of a sudden had hundreds more stages to get completely lost in.



2010

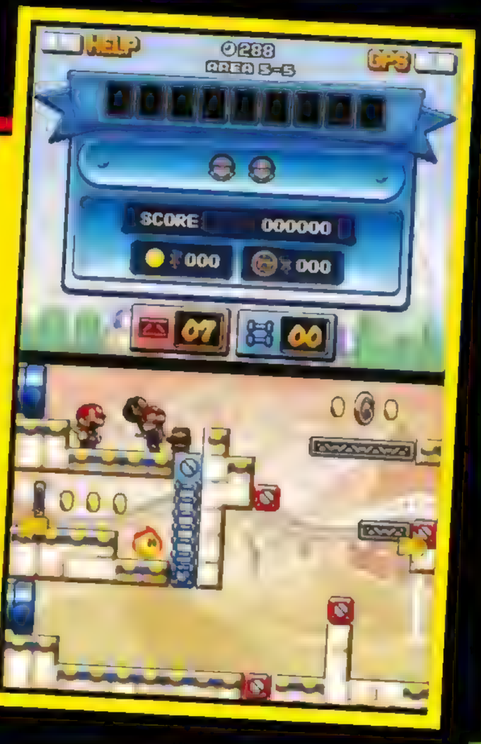
DONKEY KONG COUNTRY RETURNS

RARE MAY have left Nintendo and gone to Microsoft years prior, but if anyone could fill the gap it was Retro Studios. Having already showcased its talents with *Metroid Prime*, Retro ensured its reputation was left where it belongs. Reverting to the platforming traditions that had made it such a success in the mid-Nineties, Donkey, Diddy, mine carts, vines and bananas all returned. It was designed that way too, with Miyamoto desperate to evoke nostalgic feelings within its players.

2010

MARIO VS DONKEY KONG: MINI-LAND MAYHEM!

THIS LOW-KEY sequel is a confusing entry in the *Donkey Kong* canon. With its community given the opportunity to create its own levels only a year earlier, *Mayhem* felt slightly redundant, saved because of the gulf in skill between someone in their bedroom and Nintendo. Trust us: it's a huge gap.



2013

MARIO AND DONKEY KONG: MINIS ON THE MOVE

THE FIFTH game in the *Mario Vs. Donkey Kong* series, *Minis On The Move* arrived on the 3DS in 2013. It received a positive reception on release, with its level creator proving especially popular among fans.

2015

MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG: TIPPING STARS

FOLLOWING ON from *Minis On The Move*, *Tipping Stars* is a downloadable puzzler for the 3DS and Wii U. It was the first Nintendo-published title to support cross-buy, meaning gamers only needed to purchase it once to play on both consoles.

GAME CHANGERS

TOMB RAIDER

Released: 25 October 1996 **Publisher:** Eidos Interactive **Developer:** Core Design
System: PlayStation, PC, Sega Saturn

Tomb Raider actually had locations inspired by real history – Vilcabamba (pictured), for example, was the last stronghold of the Incas before the Spanish invaded in 1572.

Released back in 1996, Tomb Raider unleashed Lara Croft on the world – who would become more than just a protagonist, but a legitimate celebrity

CAST YOUR MIND back to 1996 – in the world of gaming, 3D was new. It was unknown ground and a lot of console developers were still testing the waters. Moving away from the pre-rendered backgrounds and the isometric views of the early PSone games, *Tomb Raider* was arguably the first action-adventure game to do 3D *properly*. The original instalment of *Tomb Raider* hit a laser-focused sweet spot in the blooming Nineties games industry – it presented a good, well-made, innovative game, while simultaneously appealing directly to the teen and young adult market. *Tomb Raider* observed what *Super Mario 64* was doing with 3D platforming, and took the genre to PlayStation's gamers – a move, it would turn out – that would cement *Tomb Raider* and Lara Croft's place in gaming history forever.

Tomb Raider's release came six months after *Super Mario 64*; a game that was, for a lot of people, perfect. It introduced watertight 3D mechanics and presented them in a familiar and accessible way. *Tomb Raider* went the exact opposite direction, appealing to the PlayStation's more hardcore audience. Rather than applying to the cutesy, family-friendly template *Mario* had set out, *Tomb Raider* focused on violence and exploration – taking its cues from the myriad action-adventure films that popularised Hollywood during the early Nineties. *Tomb Raider* was an archaeological fantasy – a benchmark game in the evolution of action platforming and woven deeply into the DNA of the likes of *Uncharted*, the *Prince Of Persia* games and even more action-orientated affairs like *InFamous*. Lara moved incredibly well for a character designed in 1996; her acrobatics were expertly designed and everything always felt natural – flipping, jumping, side-stepping, scaling walls: it was all a pleasure to do. Supported by clear visual language – you always knew where to climb, what to grab on to or how far to jump – *Tomb Raider* truly brought platforming into a safe 3D realm.

The structure of the game was simple – explore this, solve this puzzle, fight these enemies. Rinse, repeat. But therein lay the game's success – it didn't overcomplicate things, it didn't push its core mechanics too far. The game introduced you to a few abilities and created puzzles in which every ability was fully explored. *Tomb Raider* had a sense of skill progression that made the player feel smart for manipulating, even though it was mostly scripted

THE ANATOMY OF TOMB RAIDER | WHAT INSPIRED CORE DESIGN TO CREATE LARA IN THE FIRST PLACE?

THE CITY OF DERBY

★ Core Design's offices in the Midlands city of Derby actually played a big part in forming the basis for the design of Croft Manor – one of the most iconic places players come across in any *Tomb Raider* game. The city of Derby honoured Lara's legacy by renaming one of their main roads 'Lara Croft Way'.

INDIANA JONES

★ Surprising exactly no-one, Lara was originally developed to be similar to a female Indy – even her name bore the same roots, starting out as Laura Cruz. As Core Design began fleshing Laura's character out more, they decided she needed to be more English – specifically 'a proper English lady'.

ACCIDENTAL BREASTS

★ Lara's (in)famous bosom was the result of a modelling accident: when playing with Lara's model, designer Toby Gard accidentally moved the bosom measurements up to 150 per cent of the placeholder size. The other designers saw the alteration and encouraged Gard to keep it – the entire six-man team 'loved it'.

INTERNATIONAL MYTHOLOGY

★ By having Lara spelunk her way through caves and tombs around the world, Core had the licence to include all manner of legendary beasts, from Greek to Egyptian. By tapping into more questionable parts of ancient history (re: Atlantis), Core could also handily *invent* mythologies to throw into the mix.

– the illusion of this much control made everyone playing the game feel brilliant for solving this fiendish puzzle or taking out this ridiculous enemy.

Tomb Raider's other strength laid in its ambitious environments – looking back now, the textures and blocky objects seem amateurish, but at the time, the visuals were breaking new ground. From the claustrophobic confines of stone corridors and cave routes to grand, expansive halls forgotten for millennia, each location seemed relevant and logical – the world building in the game was masterful.

THE CONSIDERED ARCHITECTURAL approach to building the game sat alongside smooth animations, impressive loading speeds and movement, advanced lighting and application of colour – all these elements combined to produce a game that was not just pleasant to look at, but was technically sophisticated. Compared to the low resolutions and primary colours of *Mario*, *Tomb Raider* was a visual masterpiece.

The game's treatment of Lara as its protagonist was both groundbreaking and controversial – Lara was the first female action hero the games industry had seen and, while the original itself took care to treat her job as a protagonist seriously, her sexualised appearance and infamous proportions were also clearly marketing tools (albeit ridiculously successful ones). Lara straddled an uncanny middle ground: she was daring, inspirational and ferocious, but she also ran around the jungle in hotpants and a low-cut top. Lara's physical presence caught the attention of Timberland and Lucozade – whether she liked it or not, she was pushing gaming into mainstream media in ways the previous gaming mascots never could. Lara wasn't for children; she was an advert for adult gaming, something the console market hadn't had the luxury of showing off before.

Lara's character was always admirably set up, though; where Eidos could have thrown Lara at you and said 'Look: sexy action lady!' it didn't, for the most part, opting instead to humanise Lara in a realistic and emphatic way. Lara was an upper-class millionaire, living in the lap of luxury and knowing little of struggle. When her plane crashes on her return from a skiing trip, Lara becomes a survivalist – her return to civilisation bores her, so she sets out to globetrot, seeking treasure and excitement.

Chances are, back in 1996, you'd never been plonked in the middle of a jungle and been given the simple 'Survive!' goal before. You and Lara were going through these learning curves at the same time – and that narrative conceit made you associate more with her situation, bringing you into the game more. Lara was a determined lady, out for herself, out for plunder and glory. She was Nathan Drake before Nathan Drake – the Indiana Jones of videogames, both in terms of legacy and iconic status. And that, more than anything, is why Lara remains so strongly rooted in gaming's collective consciousness.

THE GAME'S TREATMENT OF LARA AS ITS PROTAGONIST WAS GROUNDBREAKING AND CONTROVERSIAL

KEY FACTS

- *Tomb Raider* turned the fortunes of Eidos around – the year before the game's release, Eidos suffered a $2.6 million loss. After *Tomb Raider*, profits soared to $14.5 million.
- There was never a cheat code on console games to unlock 'nude Lara' – but there was a patch for PC that applied the naked skin to Lara's model. Eidos sent out a cease and desist to all sites hosting the patch.
- The game was originally developed on Sega Saturn development kits, but *Tomb Raider* would eventually find success on PlayStation, and the first instalment was the only Saturn game in the series.

GAME CHANGERS

THE 10 SPELUNKING LESSONS TOMB RAIDER TAUGHT US

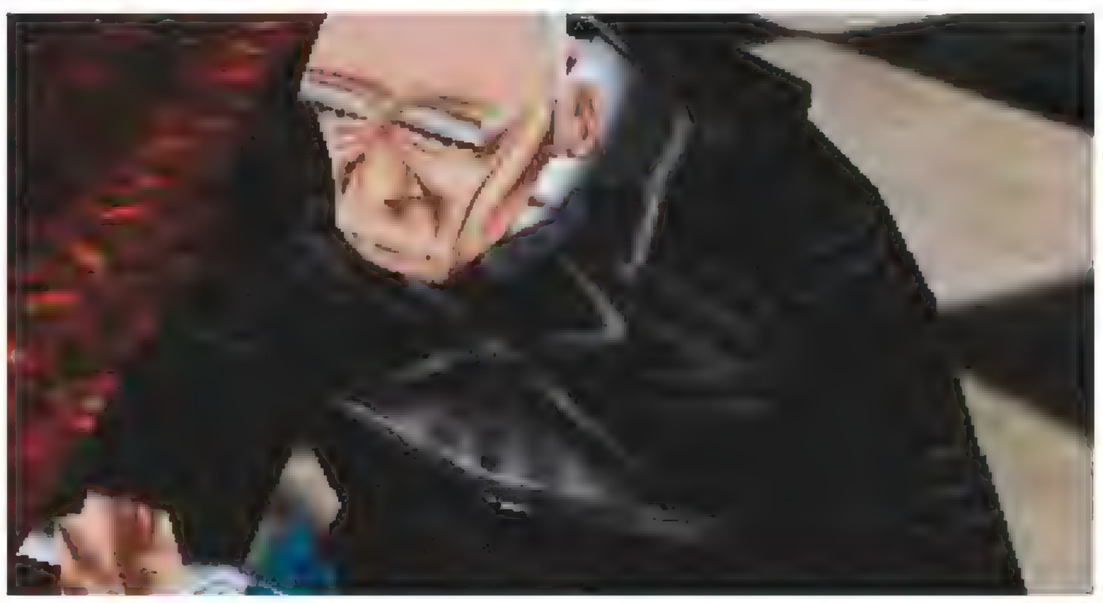
LARA'S SHEER DISREGARD FOR ANY HEALTH AND SAFETY RULES REMAIN INSPIRATIONAL TO THIS DAY. HERE ARE THE 10 BEST LESSONS LARA TAUGHT US ABOUT THE ART OF SURVIVALISM

A T-REX IS NO MATCH FOR A HANDGUN (TOMB RAIDER [1996])

LARA TAUGHT US that if you come across an enormous T-Rex in the middle of a clearing in a thick, tropical jungle – don't panic. Merely pull out your handguns, sink a couple of magazines into its flank while strafing about, and you'll be just fine. Just make sure you don't get too close – those teeth are sharp.

GARDEN ASSAULT COURSES ARE THE WAY TO GREATNESS (TOMB RAIDER II)

THE FIRST *TOMB RAIDER* only let you explore the interior of Lara's not-so-humble-abode, but once the sequel came out, you realised the sassy spelunker had a whole training ground in her back yard. That made us think: if we had those resources available to us, we'd be an invincible tomb raider too, surely?

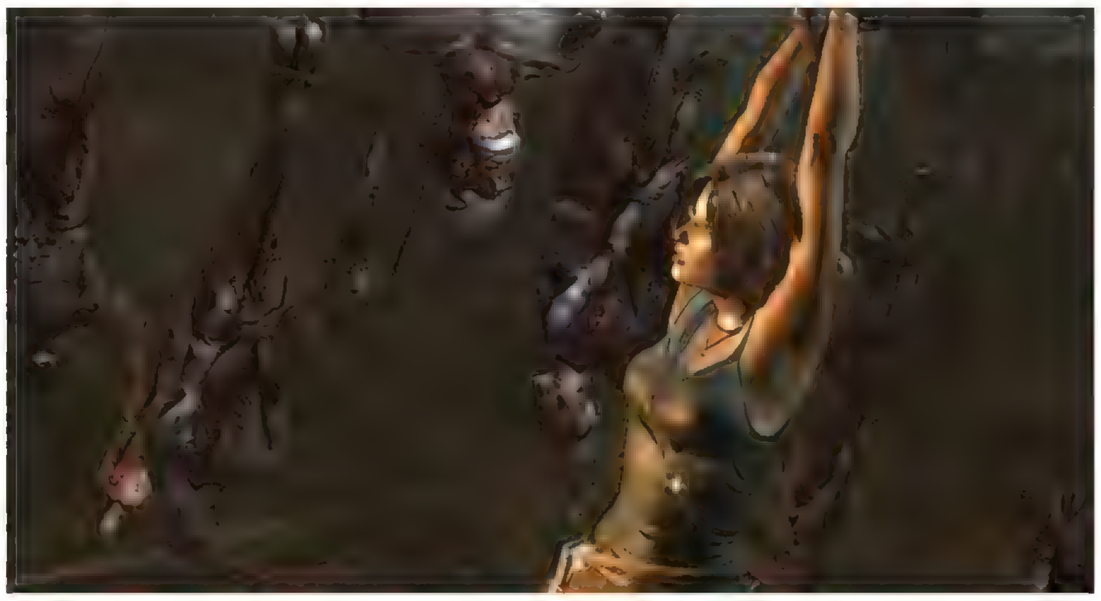


NEEDY BUTLERS CAN BE DEALT WITH (TOMB RAIDER II)

WINSTON – LARA'S LOYAL butler that would follow you around, wherever you went – could be seen as a little needy. If you felt that he needed to 'cool off' a little, you could just lead him to the freezer and lock him in. Sounds cruel, but Winston always turned out okay in the end, right? Right?

EXPLODING YOURSELF IS BAD (TOMB RAIDER II)

WALK ONE STEP forward, one step back, turn around three times and jump forward. BANG: Lara is exploded into a blocky spatter of body parts and flies around the screen. We tried re-creating this bizarre sequence in real life and it just looked like a weird interpretive dance. Don't try this at home, kids.

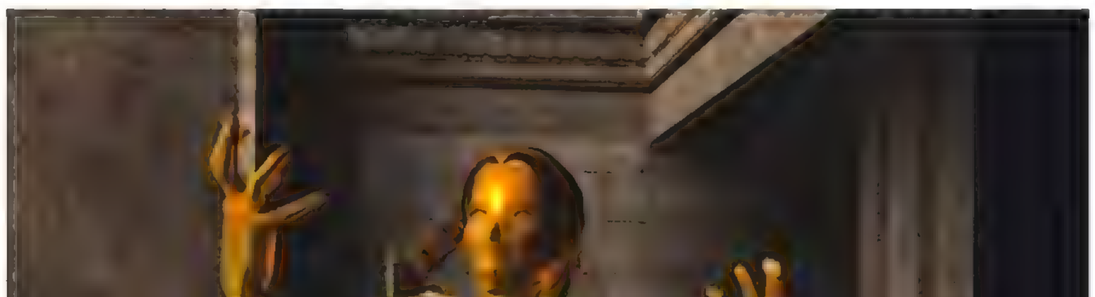


SOMETIMES IT'S BETTER TO JUST STAY AT HOME (TOMB RAIDER [2013])

AFTER YOUR STUDIES, do you fancy blowing off responsibility and travelling the globe? Maybe you want to find yourself, or visit that country you've loved all your life? 2013's *Tomb Raider* taught us that a gap year isn't always what it's cracked up to be especially if you end up heading to the Dragon's Triangle.

YOUNG EXPLORERS LOVE BUNCHES (TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION)

WHEN WE GET a flashback to young Lara in *The Last Revelation*, we see that she's got her hair tied up in bunches in place of her trademark ponytail. Maybe she was being extra-cautious – or maybe it was just Crystal Dynamics saying, "How do we make Lara look younger? ...Bunches!"



MIDAS' TOUCH IS A REAL THING (TOMB RAIDER ANNIVERSARY)

DEMONSTRATING SOME OF *Tomb Raider*'s most original puzzling and interesting level design, the hand of Midas is a death trap waiting to happen. Anyone who is familiar with the old Greek myth will know that Midas turns anything he touches into gold. Apparently, this also includes Lara.

LONDON'S UNDERGROUND IS FULL OF FREAKS (TOMB RAIDER III)

A LOT OF DIFFERENT narratives take a guess as to what *really* dwells beneath London's cobbled streets, but *Tomb Raider III* saw a catsuited Lara delve into the depths of our capital to find a group of narcissistic troglodytes that burnt away their flesh in search of eternal youth.

WHEN UNDERWATER, DON'T ALWAYS HEAD UP (TOMB RAIDER II)

AFTER STRIPPING DOWN and changing into a wetsuit in front of a po-faced Tibetan Monk, Lara dives down into a cave pool to chase a submarine. After the pilot of the vessel is chewed up by a shark, you're given 30 seconds to find air. You have to fight against instinct, though: going *up* will only lead to a watery grave.

THE GRAPPLE HOOK IS YOUR BEST FRIEND (TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND)

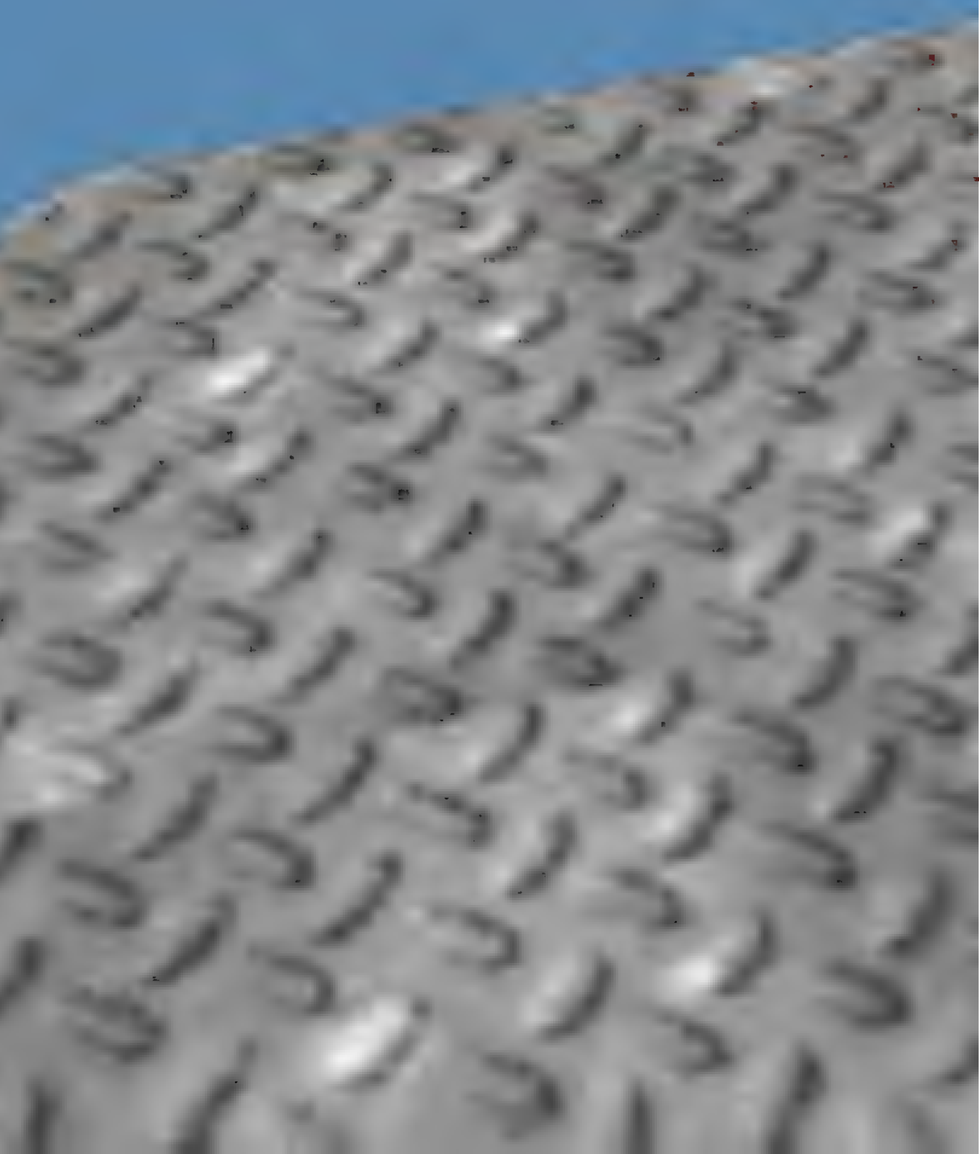
AS OF *TOMB RAIDER: Legend*, the technology had advanced enough to allow Lara a lot more animation freedom. As a result, she handily came across the grapple hook, which allowed her to wall run, create pulley systems and play with the game's physics to get her to new destinations and secret passages.

BEST BOSS

GOLDENEYE 007

Nintendo 64 [Rare] 1997

■ SEAN BEAN COULDN'T have been massively impressed that his likeness was used to create a character that appeared to have Annie Lennox's face wrapped around a pineapple, but nevertheless his villainous Alec Trevelyan is one of the highlights of Rare's seminal N64 shooter. Trevelyan has almost a Jaws-like presence throughout *GoldenEye*'s exceptionally eclectic campaign, the evasive one-time 00-agent emerging for air on several occasions to goad Bond before disappearing once again into the ether. He's a suitably frustrating antagonistic figure, mirroring Bond's uncanny invulnerability to bullets, oversized arsenal and supercilious swagger right until the very end when the nippy bastard is chucked from the top of a colossal satellite. For England? No. This one's for us.



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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...

Resident Evil©

Resident Evil is arguably one of Capcom's biggest franchises, establishing survival horror as a legitimate genre by combining thrilling scares with tense action

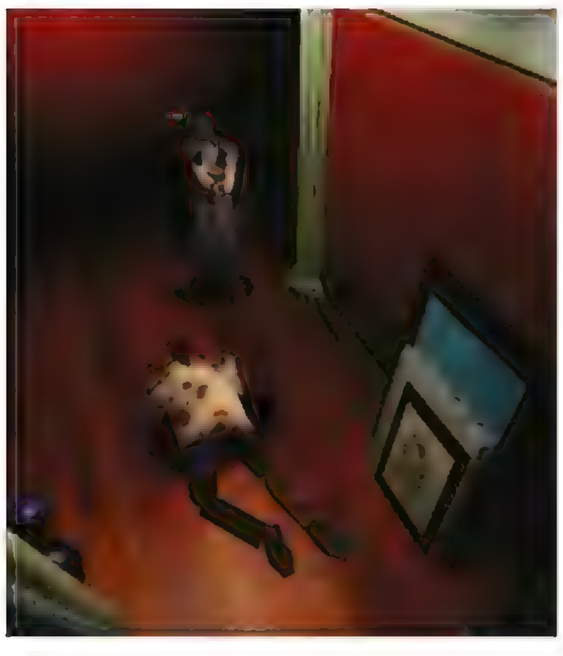
WHILE CAPCOM'S SUPERB game didn't really create the survival horror genre, despite arguments made by those who love the series, it's arguably responsible for creating many of the tropes that gamers associate with it. The franchise itself has gone through some interesting twists and turns since it was first created in 1996 and has gone on to become one of Capcom's most successful franchises, selling over 60 million units. With 2017's release of the excellent VR-supporting *Resident Evil 7: Biohazard* we felt it was the perfect time to revisit the popular series. Prepare to enter survival horror...

RESIDENT EVIL 1996

VARIOUS

Capcom's *Resident Evil* not only introduced some of the franchise's most memorable characters – Chris Redfield, Jill Valentine and Albert Wesker – but also cemented many of the mechanics that would become integral to the series for years to come. Tank-like controls, hilariously silly dialogue, careful item management, limited resources, A-to-B puzzles and tense pacing all combined to deliver a satisfyingly mature game that really helped Sony's console stand apart from the crowd.

The pre-rendered visuals created a creepily atmospheric vibe that made exploring the Spencer mansion a terrifying experience. It's an expertly crafted game from Shinji Mikami, who had previously cut his teeth on various child friendly fare including *Aladdin* and *Goof Troop*. *Resident Evil* (or *Biohazard* as it was known in Japan) arguably saw the up-and-coming director grow up and the genre grew up right beside him.



RESIDENT EVIL: DIRECTOR'S CUT 1997

PLAYSTATION

There are actually two versions of *Director's Cut* – one that supports DualShock and one that doesn't. The game itself is a solid update of the original featuring a new Beginner's mode, as well as an Arranged version, which featured a new location for key items, new clothes for each character and a much more powerful gun.

RESIDENT EVIL 2 1998

VARIOUS

It's telling that the two best *Resident Evil* games both feature Leon S Kennedy. Set two months after the events of the first game, Capcom's sequel further establishes the convoluted plot that the series would become famous for, but greatly ramps up virtually every aspect of the game. The locations are larger, with the vast majority of the game taking place in Raccoon City's police station, while the visuals are greatly improved, matched by a simply stunning soundtrack.

Resident Evil 2 focuses on two characters, Leon S Kennedy and Claire Redfield and is spread across two discs. Interestingly, while both scenarios are often set in the same locations, their puzzles and storylines change dramatically, greatly adding to the filmic atmosphere that director Hideki Kamiya wanted to create. *Resident Evil 2* also introduced support characters, including the infamous Ada Wong, who appear at certain points of the adventure and are occasionally playable. It's also memorable for being the first game in the series to give you visual clues to your character's current health status: handy, as it's not an easy game. Interestingly, Capcom's sequel started off as a completely different game, which was scrapped a good way into its development when producer Shinji Mikami decided it was too boring.

RESIDENT EVIL 3: NEMESIS 1999

VARIOUS

Some consider *Nemesis* to be something of a back step for the series, but it introduced many key mechanics, most notably the incredibly useful 180-degree turn and a handy dodge attack. Both new moves are particularly useful as you'll need as much agility as you can muster in order to deflect the continual assaults of the *Nemesis* of the title, a huge bio-mechanically created creature that comes equipped with a rocket launcher, absorbs bullets like a cheap sponge and continually chases Jill Valentine (the only selectable character) during key points of the game.

Yes it's more linear than the previous games, but the assaults of *Nemesis*, the ability to craft ammunition and being able to use oil drums to create explosive damage to nearby enemies makes the game far more action-packed as a result. Oh, and it introduces the mini-game 'The Mercenaries – Operation: Mad Jackal'.

RESIDENT EVIL SURVIVOR 2000

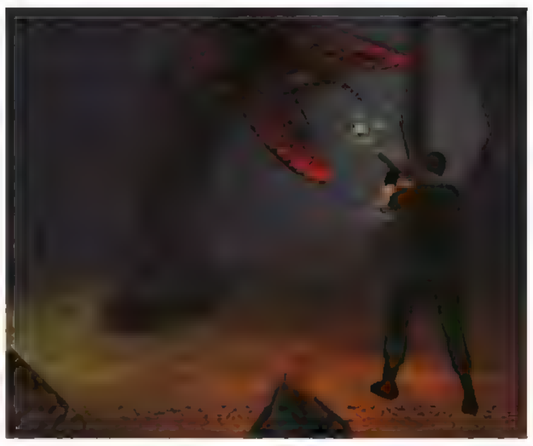
PLAYSTATION

Survivor was Capcom's first spin-off from the main games and it's not a good one. Unlike previous titles it's essentially a lightgun game, but one where you have free movement. Things get slightly easier when using a lightgun, but it remains a fiddly experience due to the clunky controls. It's a pity the gameplay is so laborious, as *Survivor* actually makes a good attempt at transferring the *Resi* universe into a first-person world. Interestingly, the US version of the game lacks lightgun support, meaning you'll have to rely on the piggish joypad controls.

RESIDENT EVIL: CODE: VERONICA 2000

DREAMCAST

Code: Veronica never seems to get the love it deserves, possibly because it was the first *Resi* game to not originally appear on a Sony console. It's the first game in the series to use 3D backgrounds and a movable camera and occasionally switches to first-person when using certain weapons. While mechanically it's very much business as usual, the ability to pick up and use herbs when your inventory is full does make a huge difference, particularly as *Code: Veronica* is quite a tough *Resident Evil* game. Like *Resident Evil 2* it takes place across numerous locations and features extras once the game is completed. In this case it's the rather enjoyable Battle Game, which feels like an early precursor to the excellent Mercenaries mode of *Resident Evil 4*.



RESIDENT EVIL: CODE: VERONICA X 2000

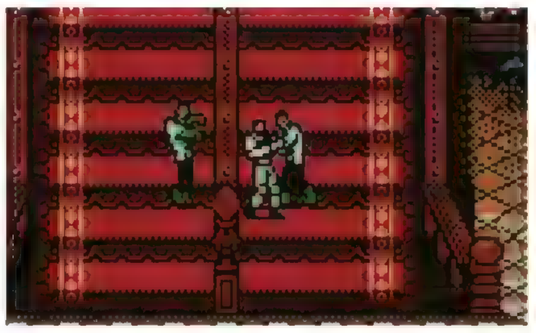
VARIOUS

Despite the controversy of *Code: Veronica*'s Dreamcast release, it wasn't long before the PS2 got its own version. It's largely the same game, with slightly improved visuals and additional cutscenes that focus on the increasing popularity of Albert Wesker. It also features an additional DVD called 'Wesker's Report', which delves deeper into the shady character. It received a HD re-release in 2011.

RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN 2001

GAME BOY COLOR

Gaiden was predominantly created by British developer M2, making it the first title in the series to be created outside Japan. It's also nowhere near as bad as reports suggest, thanks to a huge tanker to explore, Barry Burton getting some much needed limelight as one of the main characters, and a slick combat system that switches to first-person whenever the player engages zombies. Yes it was never going to capture the atmosphere of the PlayStation original, but *Gaiden* remains a resoundingly solid adventure game.



RESIDENT EVIL SURVIVOR 2 CODE: VERONICA 2001

VARIOUS

The second *Survivor* game is a notable improvement, but still lacks the sheer visceral thrills of Sega's *House Of The Dead* series. Based on *Code: Veronica*, players control Claire Redfield or Steve Burnside and can use both lightguns and joypads. In addition to featuring two unique modes: Dungeon and Arcade, *Survivor 2* also introduces partner assistance, in the form of a computer-controlled player that will lay down cover fire for you. There's also a timer that introduces the Nemesis from *Resident Evil 3* if players dawdle for too long.

RESIDENT EVIL REMAKE 2002

GAMECUBE

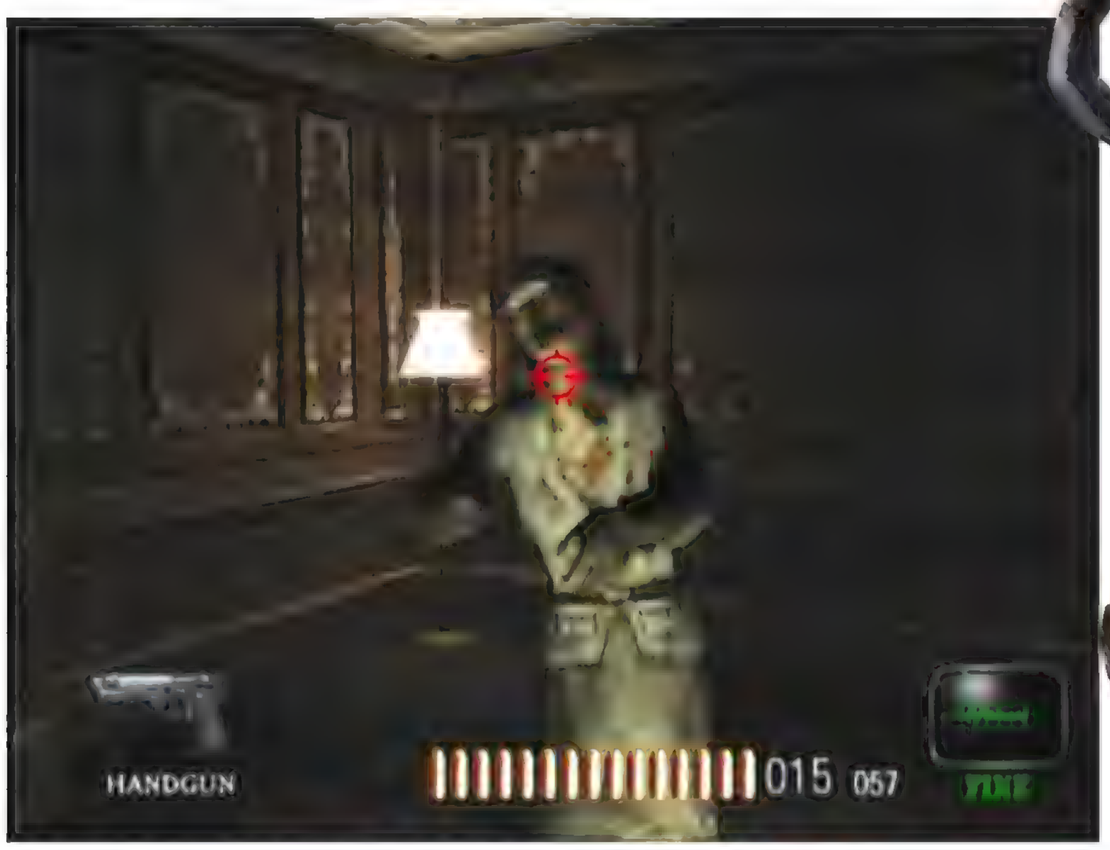
When Capcom revealed that its next brace of *Resident Evil* games, including *Resident Evil 4*, would be exclusive to the GameCube there was uproar. Capcom saved face, however, with this astonishing update of the original game that remains one of the best remakes of recent times. In addition to astonishing visuals, *Resident Evil* on GameCube is retrofitted with many of the later *Resi* mechanics, including the 180-degree turn and the ability to judge a character's health based on its onscreen actions.

It includes several new areas that were cut from the original game, equips Jill and Chris with handy defensive weapons and introduces the dreaded Crimson Head Zombies – extremely fast and dangerous foes that replace those zombies that weren't fully destroyed by the player on their first encounter. It was re-released on Wii in 2009, but adds very little over the original GameCube release.

RESIDENT EVIL ZERO 2002

GAMECUBE

Many don't like *Zero*, possibly because it has a far more insectoid theme than previous games, with zombies taking a noticeable backseat to giant scorpions, giant centipedes and other creepy crawlies. By far the best feature of *Zero* is its excellent Partner Zapping mechanic that lets the player switch between both characters at will. Rebecca Chambers is versatile but weak, while prisoner Billy Coen is built like a tank and can use a lighter and push heavy objects. Both characters' abilities must be combined together to complete the many puzzles thrown at you, making it a unique addition to the series. Originally planned for the N64's ill-fated 64DD, it was switched to the N64, before eventually resurfacing on the Cube. A lazy Wii port showed up in 2008.



RESIDENT EVIL: DEAD AIM 2003

PLAYSTATION 2

The last game in the *Survivor* series is easily the best, but it still falls massively short of the quality found in the main series. It's the first game in the series to combine both first-person and third-person views, but is still hampered by the same grid-based control system that made the earlier games such a pain to control. It certainly looks pretty, with impressive visuals and the ability to move and shoot makes it stand apart from many of the other games in the series, but it's still a bland mishmash of genres.

RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK 2003

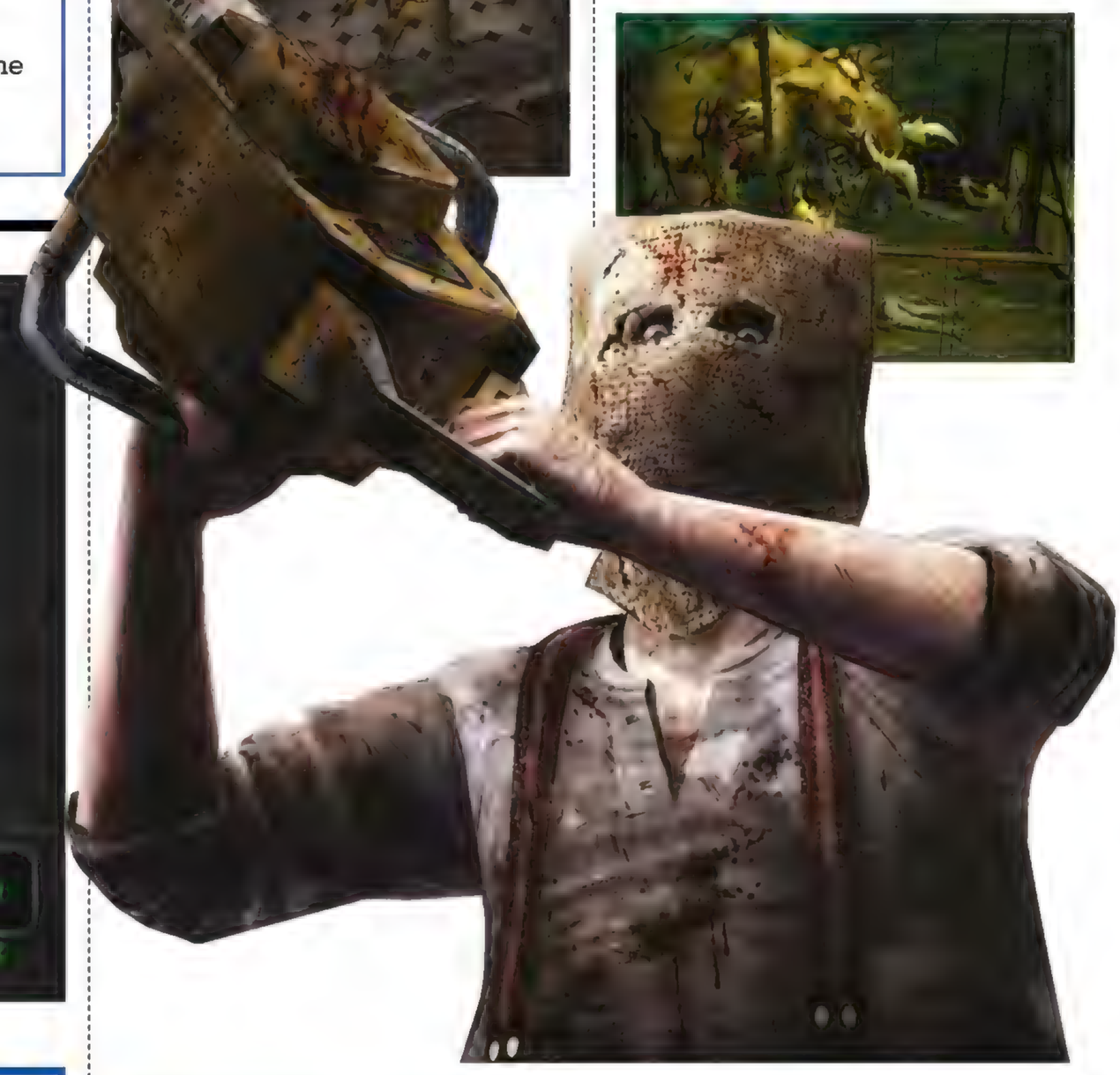
PLAYSTATION 2

Plans for *Outbreak* had circled around the Capcom offices for a good five years before the game became a reality. It's an interesting addition to the series, featuring online play, a large number of characters (eight, in fact) and five unique scenarios to fight through. Sadly, the ability to play with three other players was completely stripped from the PAL version of the game, making for a horrendously frustrating experience, as you often find yourself ill-equipped to deal with the large number of zombies the game throws at you. Mechanically it's exactly what you'd expect from a *Resident Evil* game, but the pacing, carefully placed scares and strong boss encounters are nowhere to be seen.

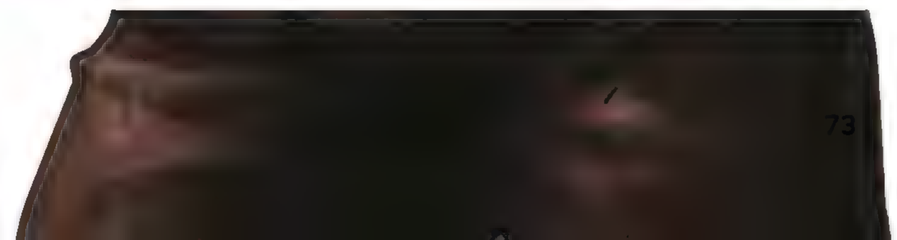
RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK FILE 2 2004

PLAYSTATION 2

Outbreak's sequel is awesome because it features zombie elephants. Okay, so it's not incredible, but it's a far better structured game than *Outbreak* thanks to better balance, more interesting scenarios and numerous little tweaks to the gameplay. The original eight characters return and this time PAL users got to experience full online play. Despite both games having their servers pulled by Capcom, fans have kept the Japanese versions going on private servers.



"WHEN CAPCOM REVEALED THAT ITS NEXT BRACE OF RESIDENT EVIL GAMES WOULD BE EXCLUSIVE TO THE GAMECUBE, THERE WAS UPROAR"



RESIDENT EVIL 4 2005

VARIOUS

Shinji Mikami's sequel is quite possibly one of the most important games of the last ten years. In addition to breathing fresh life into the series, it reinvented action games and the third-person shooter, influencing the likes of *Gears Of War* and *Dead Space*.

Mikami essentially redesigned *Resident Evil 4* several times before he settled on the cocktail of action and horror that appears in the final game. Moving the camera closer to Leon pulls you into the on-screen action, while the ability to specifically shoot out body parts makes managing the large crowd of enemies you face far tenser. Context-sensitive buttons allow Leon to pull off an impressive number of moves, from roundhousing enemies to kicking down ladders and stabbing the necks of giants, while the new inventory system kept the tedious item management of earlier games to a bare minimum.

Resident Evil 4's set pieces are still some of the best around, while its dynamic pacing, sheer variety and tense shepherding of Ashley (who Leon has been sent to rescue) make it stand apart from its many peers. It's arguably more action than horror, but it was just what the series and the genre needed. And it still managed to pull off a series of incredibly gruesome scenes, proving that while Mikami was content to take the series in an exciting new direction, he hadn't forgotten what had made it so popular in the first place. While HD versions of the game do exist, we'd argue that the enhanced Wii port is the definitive version to own.

RESIDENT EVIL: DEADLY SILENCE 2006

NINTENDO DS

Capcom celebrated *Resident Evil*'s 10th anniversary by remaking the game for Nintendo's dual-screened portable. In addition to including the original game it also features Rebirth mode, which introduces plenty of clever touch-based additions that greatly adds to the overall gameplay. Zombie slashing, CPR (by blowing into the mic) and shaking off enemies all adds to the atmosphere, while the smaller screen also enhances the creepy vibes of the classic game. Rebirth also includes a couple of mini-games for up to four players that adds further meat to what is essentially yet another remake of the PlayStation original.

RESIDENT EVIL: THE UMBRELLA CHRONICLES 2007

WII

This was the logical evolution of the *Gun Survivor* series and it works incredibly well. *The Umbrella Chronicles* is a rather enjoyable on-rails shooter that focuses on the events found in the first three games and *Resident Evil Zero*. It's possible to look around the playing area with the Nunchuk, but you're effectively mowing down classic enemies as they continually assault you. There are a large number of levels to unlock and plenty of alternate routes, ensuring that *The Umbrella Chronicles* has plenty of replay value. A HD version for the PlayStation 3 was released in 2012.

RESIDENT EVIL 5 2009

VARIOUS

The first *Resident Evil* game for the then next-gen consoles was a long time coming and quite controversial, due to all the racism claims that surrounded it upon release. What's interesting about *Resident Evil 5* is that it's essentially two different games depending on how you play through it. Play on your own and Capcom's game becomes amazingly frustrating because newcomer Sheva is utterly useless as a supporting character. She constantly stumbles into trouble, easily gets herself surrounded by enemies and rarely gives you help when it's needed.

Play with a second player, however, and the game transforms dramatically. It lacks the well-structured pace of *4* of course, and the less said about the lousy cover system the better, but it otherwise becomes a lot of fun. There's something immensely satisfying about exploring the African setting with a friend, while the online version of *Mercenaries* is arguably the best version of the mini-game yet. There's a definite move towards all-out action compared to *4* – it's as action-packed as Chris's biceps are huge – and the final boss is a disappointment, but it's a solid addition to the series.

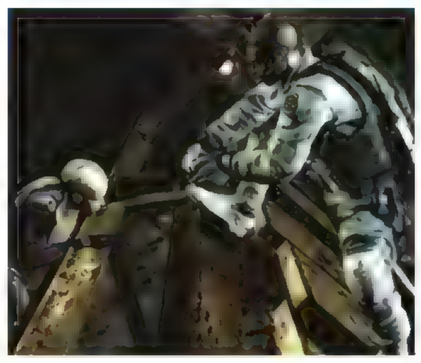
RESIDENT EVIL: THE DARKSIDE CHRONICLES 2009

WII

Capcom's second Wii shooter is business as usual, although it offers an improved story and enhanced visuals. It chooses to focus on *Resident Evil 2* and *Code: Veronica*, but it's more character-orientated than *The Umbrella Chronicles*. A HD version was released on PS3 in 2012.

RESIDENT EVIL 5: GOLD EDITION 2010

VARIOUS

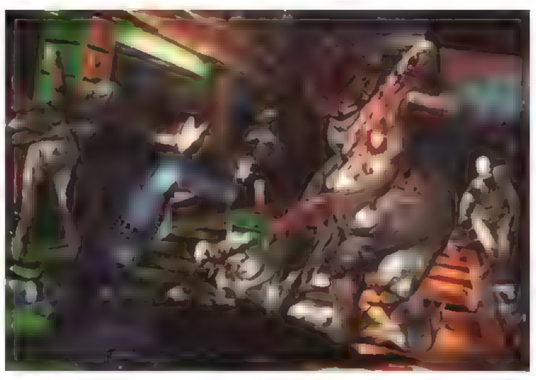


Capcom released several pieces of DLC for *Resident Evil 5*, including Versus, an online multiplayer mode, various costumes for Mercenaries and two standalone story-based adventures, Lost In Nightmares and Desperate Escape. *Gold Edition* combined all this together, while also including Mercenaries Reunion and PlayStation Move support for the PS3 version.

RESIDENT EVIL: THE MERCENARIES 3D 2011

NINTENDO 3DS

Don't buy a second-hand version as it's impossible to wipe saves. While the 3D isn't the best, *Mercenaries* proves to be a solid score attack game, even if it brings little new to previous Mercenaries games. Despite this it's a fun score attack game with plenty of memorable locations, a host of recognisable characters (although Leon S Kennedy is nowhere to be seen) and a small selection of brutally tough bosses. The maps are well designed while the graphics really show off the power of Nintendo's handheld system.



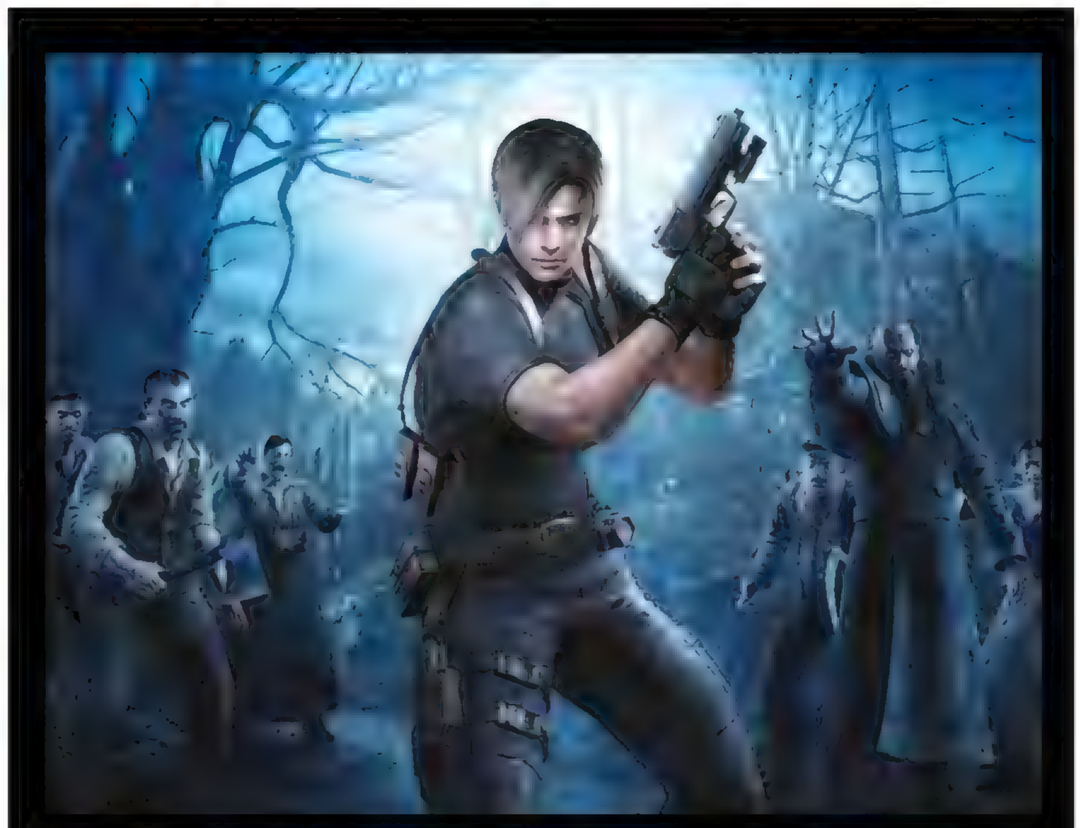
RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS 2011

NINTENDO 3DS

Revelations was one of the first 3DS games to utilise the Circle Pad Pro add-on. While it makes a good attempt at recapturing the early horror of the PlayStation games, it feels quite budget in places, particularly when the player is continually facing the same few enemy skins.

Like the later *Resident Evil 6*, *Revelations*' main campaign is split between several groups of characters and takes in various locations, from a deserted ship in the Mediterranean to an airstrip in the mountains. It allows the player to move and shoot, but also introduces *Metroid Prime*-style scanning and the ability to switch between three weapons. The dodge move of earlier games returns, while StreetPass support is also included. *Revelations* also introduces "Raid Mode", an excellent new game mode that sees you battling through arranged versions of earlier scenarios.

A HD version was released in 2013 for PS3, Xbox 360, Wii U and PC. While it added various bits of new content, it also highlighted the budget-like roots of the 3DS original.



AN INTERVIEW WITH YOSHIAKI HIRABAYASHI

Capcom's producer looks back at the Resident Evil series

How many *Resident Evil* games have you been involved in now?

I've worked on five titles – *Resident Evil 4-6*, *Resident Evil Zero*, and the GameCube version of *Resident Evil*.

What is it that drew you to the series?

I studied computer graphics at college, and was invited by Capcom to try interviewing for a job there, so it was really something that I got into initially due to the situation at Capcom when I joined. That was the team I entered and I've been involved with the series ever since.

What do you find most satisfying about creating *Resident Evil* games?

Creating the games is such a long process. With that in mind, seeing players enjoy the games after they come out is the most satisfying and rewarding part of the job, and that goes for any game, not just *Resident Evil*.

Why do you think *Resident Evil* remains so popular?

I think that the games remain popular because they are enjoyable – not just as survival horror games, but also through the story, characters and other aspects.

What do you feel *Resident Evil HD* will bring to the series now?

I think it's a great chance for players to experience the original *Resident Evil* title, which is acclaimed by many as a masterpiece, in amazing HD quality.

Which of the *Resident Evil* series is your favourite game and why?

The GameCube version of *Resident Evil* – not just because it was my first project, but also because I think it was a very well-rounded game and a great survival horror title.

Who is your favourite *Resident Evil* character?

It's difficult to choose just one, but I would say Ada. Her mysterious presence in the stories adds a certain extra something to the *Resident Evil* series.

RESI ON THE SILVER SCREEN

Capcom's *Resident Evil* series is easily the most successful videogame licence to appear on the big screen. While the quality of the films ranges from okay to "god, my eyes, my eyes" they've all performed well at the box office. Paul W S Anderson has been involved in all six live-action films. His wife, Milla Jovovich, plays Alice, a character created specifically for the films. Despite their critical disdain, the series has generated over $915 million.

Capcom has also released three anime-based movies. The short film *Biohazard 4D-Executer* was released in 2000, *Resident Evil: Degeneration* focused on Leon S Kennedy and Claire Redfield and was released in 2008, while *Resident Evil Damnation* was released in 2012 and follows Leon and Ada Wong. A fourth animated film, *Resident Evil: Vendetta*, is set for release in 2017. The animated films are set in the same universe as the actual games.

RESIDENT EVIL: OPERATION RACCOON CITY 2012

VARIOUS

Conceptually, *Operation Raccoon City* is a great idea, expanding on the online mechanics first hinted at in *Outbreak*. Unfortunately, the game itself is something of a mess due to atrociously bad AI, glitch visuals and boring set pieces. Despite its overall shoddiness, gamers loved the idea of a *SOCOM*-styled squad-based shooter and it went on to sell over 2 million units.

RESIDENT EVIL 6 2012

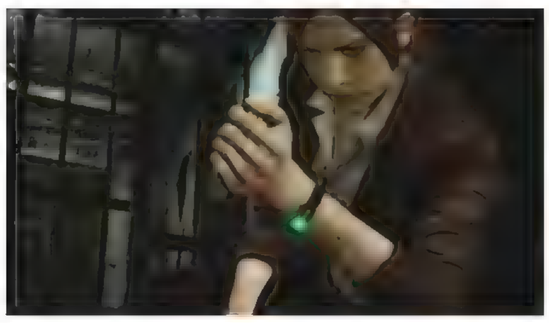
VARIOUS

Spread across four large scenarios and featuring an extremely lengthy campaign mode, *Resident Evil 6* is a bizarre, bloated triple-A game that tries far too hard. There are plenty of great action sequences to be found and the combat is arguably the best in the series, but there's way too much filler, which massively cuts down its enjoyment. Like *Resident Evil 5*, it works far better with a second player, as the computer AI is prone to hinder you as much as it helps. Each scenario is based around a specific character: Leon S Kennedy, Chris Redfield, Jake Muller and Ada Wong and varies greatly in its style and pacing, with Leon's being the most accurate to previous games. While the main game divided critics, it still managed to sell over 5 million copies.

RESIDENT EVIL HD 2015

VARIOUS

While it's essentially a HD update of the GameCube game, a number of new features make it worthy of inclusion here. The new widescreen mode does a great job of showing off the original's spectacular graphics, while the free movement, makes the game far more enjoyable to play (and quite a bit easier as a result).



RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS 2 2015

VARIOUS

Released four years after the original *Revelations*, *Revelations 2* returned with Barry Burton as a playable character, while it also supported co-operative gameplay and was delivered in episodic form, spread across four parts. Not only that but it also introduced players to Barry's daughter, Moira.

RESIDENT EVIL 7 2017

VARIOUS

After the disappointment of *Resident Evil 6* and its overblown action, the latest instalment took the *Resi* series back to its roots of exploration and horror, placing gamers into the shoes of Ethan Winters. The game's scares are ramped up further with PlayStation VR support, creating an experience that is terrifying, exhilirating and immersive – a breathtaking return to form that the franchise was crying out for.

MOBILE RESIDENT EVIL

Capcom's franchise has appeared on various mobiles with varying degrees of success. First up was *Resident Evil: The Missions*, which was released in 2003. *Confidential Report* followed in 2005 and was a turn-based strategy game – a first for the series. *Genesis* was a puzzle game that appeared in 2008 and received a sequel, *Uprising*, a couple of years later. There have been social games in the form of 2011's *Outbreak Survive*, and shooters in the form of *Assault The Nightmare* and *Zombie Buster*. The most successful offerings have been on iOS however, and include cut-down versions of *Resident Evil 4* and *Mercenaries*. There's also *Degeneration* and *Afterlife*, which are based on their respective movies.

WHY I ♥...

Super Mario World

TED TIMMINS,
LIONHEAD STUDIOS

Super Mario World will always be one of my favourite videogames. I remember playing it for the first time; I was nine years old and had a Commodore, but my friend had a fancy new SNES thing, so I went over to his house after school to see what all the fuss was about. My life changed right at that moment. The level he was playing was Vanilla Dome 2, and I felt like I had just witnessed the future. The sounds, graphics, and physics for platform jumping were all perfect. To this day, I don't feel it has aged and remains the perfect example of everything a 2D platformer should be. I enjoy completing it once a year, not just for tradition, but because it still brings me so much joy. Life would be very different had I never played Super Mario World.

"Life would be very different had I never played Super Mario World"

TED TIMMINS, LIONHEAD STUDIOS

BEHIND THE SCENES

STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

2003 was a long, long time ago in gaming, but BioWare's first crack at a sci-fi RPG has never been far, far away from its players' hearts

Released: July 2003
Format: Xbox/PC
Publisher: LucasArts
Developer: BioWare
Key Staff: Casey Hudson, director; Drew Karpyshyn, writer
Composer: Jeremy Soule

DEPENDING ON HOW you look at it, *Knights Of The Old Republic* is either 4,000 years before Obi Wan Kenobi's time, or some nebulous amount described simply as "A long time ago" – not to mention being in a galaxy far, far away. Whatever number you prefer, one thing's for sure: had he been around for its launch, Obi Wan would certainly have felt a very different disturbance in the Force – as if millions of voices suddenly cried out in joy and didn't leave the house for the best part of a week.

Over a decade later, *KOTOR* is still a strong contender for the best *Star Wars* game ever made, which is no small feat considering that LucasArts produced the likes of *Jedi Knight* and *TIE Fighter* before succumbing to the dark side of tie-in games to capitalise on the prequels. At the time though, it was so much more – a chance to not merely play in the *Star Wars* universe, but actually live in it for a while.

LIFE BEFORE GALAXIES

However, that alone wasn't enough to make it great, and much of the credit has to go to BioWare's attitude as much as its creation. Simply list many of the set pieces, and *KOTOR* can come across as Fanservice: The Game. Of course you get a lightsaber. Of course you get a smuggling ship, which isn't the Millennium Falcon but comes from much the same lineage. Of course you end up on Tatooine at some point, that backwater planet that's at the core of more intergalactic strife than Arrakis. The design is practically a list of everything that *Star Wars* fans could possibly geek out over. And also Pazaak, the dullest card game ever made.

BioWare handles all this perfectly, bringing just as much enthusiasm to building all this as the fans would have to playing it, along with RPG chops honed over past games like *Baldur's Gate* and its sister company Black Isle's own Infinity Engine games. Take for instance the scene where you get your lightsaber, after a long stretch of being restricted to at best waving around vibroblades and making sad little 'whum whum' sounds. It's an earned moment, with training handled largely via the magic of a montage, but still leaving plenty around the side where you have to answer questions on Jedi philosophy and prove your worth in a field exam that unsurprisingly turns out to be as much about redemption as martial prowess.

When done, you even get to make your own lightsaber in a way that respects that it's not simply a formality for either the characters, or just another weapon for the player to craft. It's the kind of scene that only comes from deep love and understanding, even if the mechanical details are nothing special.

The big story linking the big moments is relatively basic, but with a fantastic twist that's now unfortunately about as well-known as Aerith dying and Samus being a girl. Sith lord Darth Malak is smashing his way through the galaxy with far more ships than he should have access to, and the only one who can stop him is an arrogant, novice Jedi called Bastila (Jennifer Hale, in one of her first big roles, and the one that would ultimately lead to her voicing the fan-favourite female Shepard in BioWare's *Mass Effect* series). You, however, are not Bastila. You're a random Republic soldier who just happens to be on the same ship as her when the Sith attack, who ends up being the only one who can rescue her, and then team up to take on Malak and the plan hatched by his old master, the legendary Sith Lord Revan.

If you don't want to know the big secret, that you actually *are* Revan mindwiped by the Republic, look away now. After two games and an MMO though, there's little point being coy. Its initial reveal in 2003 though still stands as one of the genre's best executed twists, not least because it's one of the few that puts it midway through the game rather than at the end and thus has plenty of time to explore its implications on Revan him/herself, the ragtag party gathered from across the galaxy, and what it means for the big quest and its paths to both the Light and Dark side. It's also a moment that's still rippling through the *Star Wars* universe.

IT'S STILL A STRONG CONTENDER FOR THE BEST STAR WARS GAME EVER MADE

THE REBEL ALLIANCE

What's most impressive about *KOTOR*'s storytelling though is just how brave much of it is. Most *Star Wars* games offer the chance to be evil, for a cackling, non-canonical ending. *KOTOR* though features an undercover trip to the Sith Academy on Korriban, where even a Light Side player can find themselves forced to torture and betray to maintain

WHO'S WHO IN THE OLD REPUBLIC?

Five of the nine characters happy to come along for the ride

BASTILA SHAN

Bastila wants everyone to see her as a Jedi Master, but really she's little but a padawan promoted much too fast due to her gifts with the Force. Just for starters, she's not above using Force Push to knock a teenage Twi'lek girl on her blue ass for not showing her proper respect. And then telling her 'You must have tripped.'

CARTH ONASI

Carth isn't very interesting, setting the pattern for most first BioWare male NPCs to come (his actor even plays Kaiden in *Mass Effect*). He's handy early on, due to a lack of alternatives, and fiercely loyal to his friends and his principles but usually ends up on the bench around the point blasters are swapped for lightsabers.

MISSION VAO

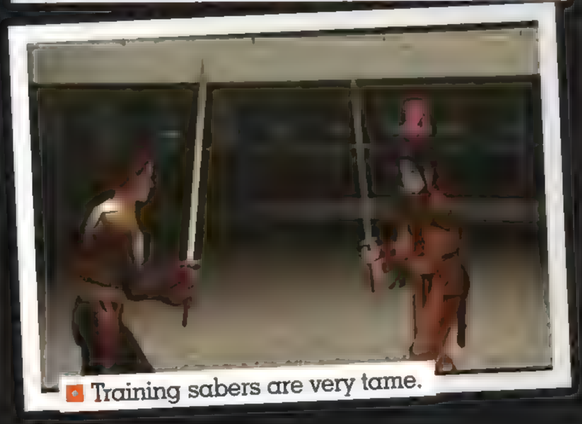
A cheerful street urchin who manages to worm her way onto the team along with her Wookiee best friend Zaalbar. In a staggeringly dark moment, the Dark Side ending involves Zaalbar being forced to murder her due to a life-debt to the player character. Thankfully, it's the Light Side ending that's canon.

JOLEE BINDO

Another example of a character deviating from template, Jolee is a former Jedi who turned away from the order and sees the world in shades of grey. He's sarcastic, cantankerous and worldly-wise, but a good man with a story for any situation and enough practice with a lightsaber to handle just about any foe.

HK-47

If C3-PO had an evil mirror universe copy, HK-47 would be he. A killer with an assassin's sense of professionalism, thankfully tempered with a loyalty towards Revan – if only because that means there's never a shortage of targets. Inevitably more badass in the lore than he ever is in actual combat.



Training sabers are very tame.

cover. There's a quest involving a protocol droid forced into a sex-slave relationship with his owner after the death of her husband, with it choosing suicide over returning to her warm organic embrace. Also, Bastila gets captured by the baddies, tortured, and actually breaks under it, turning to the Dark Side and ultimately facing the restored Revan in a potential duel to the death.

Perhaps most surprisingly though, given the main universe's general desire to avoid the subject entirely, *KOTOR* featured the *Star Wars* universe's first homosexual character – an initially fallen Jedi (that fall having nothing to do with her sexuality) called Juhani. It's not treated as a big deal, with her main character trait being her temper and fear of it leading to the Dark Side, but it's not hidden either. For context, it wouldn't be until 2006 that another homosexual character entered the series, in Karen Traviss's *Boba Fett: A Practical Man*, and BioWare was still facing controversy over this stuff as of 2012's *Mass Effect 3*.

This willingness to take risks and dig deeper into the universe would go into overdrive for the sequel, *The Sith Lords*, a game designed by Chris Avellone and his team at Obsidian rather than BioWare. It's a troubled game, seemingly rushed out long before it was ready, but it still stands out as a fan-favourite for its fantastic writing that's less interested in playing in the *Star Wars* universe then taking a serrated scalpel to its soft underbelly and gutting it like a particularly warm tauntaun.

Again, it follows a seemingly random soldier with a hidden destiny, only this time it's a borderline war criminal who severed her own link to the Force and now travels as a wound in it, whose advisor is less Obi Wan than an evil mother-in-law,

There are many lightsabers, but this one is yours. Please don't use it to make toast.

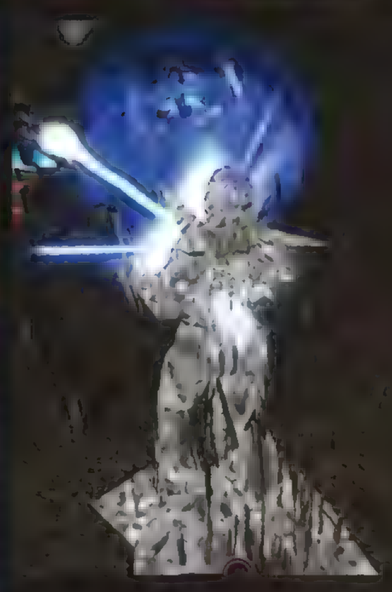
A LONG TIME AGO

As with many retro games, going back to play *KOTOR* now is a mixed experience. Its graphics are not exactly impressive, though the clean design of the *Star Wars* universe certainly doesn't hurt it. Most locations could have been designed by an architect specialising in box factories, with areas that are far too small and underpopulated to properly convey cities and wretched hives.

All of that, though, is relatively easy to ignore, and backed up with some genuinely good design – fantastic audio for instance, with star composer Jeremy Soule riffing on classic *Star Wars* themes for the background music and all the action making good use of the right sound effects. The cast too is excellent, with the party alone covering a range of characters from ragamuffin Twi'lek Mission Vao and her Wookiee bodyguard Zaalbar to the deliciously evil 'protocol' droid HK-47. Originally picked up on Tatooine to help translate Sand People language, it quickly transpires that in fact he's Revan's former assassin and – in his own words – "A droid, master, with programming. Even if I did not enjoy killing, I would have no choice. Thankfully, I enjoy it very much."

Needless to say, HK-47 was *KOTOR*'s breakout character, returning in the sequel and *The Old Republic*, and one of the few known scenes from the cancelled *KOTOR 3* involved him damaged and clinging to the player's back, no doubt providing scathing commentary along with covering fire as he's ignominiously carried off for repair.

WHAT THEY SAID...



Knights succeeds in evoking the films without simply plagiarising Lucas's stories and characters. BioWare has cemented itself as the number one RPG dev

games™ 9/10
October 2003

and whose crew includes – to name just a few – a ruthless gangster in probe droid form, a psychopathic Wookiee trapped in a life-debt to a bounty hunter he despises, and a soldier who turns out to be a former Jedi hunter and torturer specialising in breaking Light Side wills to swell the ranks of the Sith – one of them being a woman he loved. She unlocked his hidden Force sensitivity. He tortured her to death, then felt bad after realising his true feelings and fled. This is not exactly a cheery action romp.

Instead, it takes great pleasure in spitting in the player's face, with scenes like a choice to give a beggar money or send them away both ending in tragedy and a pious lecture, and an ending (admittedly due to development problems that forced an early release that was missing vast amounts of content and polish, especially in the final stretch) consisting largely of all these broken going to a desolate planet to find out that everything really is terrible, followed by the planet exploding and killing at least most of them. Thankfully, fans have patched in much of the missing detail, but it remains such a seriously bleak, cynical experience that it's honestly amazing that Lucasfilm was willing to sign off on it.

It's the Old Republic; Jedi and Sith are everywhere. But not necessarily popular.

AS WITH MANY RETRO GAMES, GOING BACK TO PLAY KOTOR IS A MIXED EXPERIENCE

THE RING OF THE SITH

Underneath all this though is *KOTOR*'s own phantom menace; its RPG system. As mentioned, the *KOTOR* engine was the same one used for *Neverwinter Nights*, but it also used *Dungeons and Dragons* rules for its character builds and combat. To BioWare's credit, this isn't as tricky as it could have been. Characters can be upgraded automatically, and the rules map relatively well to lightsabers and blasters. It still feels incredibly clumsy though, with invisible dice always rolling, even the most talented Jedi often left impotently thrashing away, and stat screens bursting with what these days can best be described as 'needless crap'.

Simply healing the party for instance involves various stats acting as modifiers, while the magic of abilities like Force Armour is completely undercut by it actually translating as a +6 bonus to Defence. The balance also becomes slightly strange, as while early on it's important to raid every box and keep a stack of healing kits available, unlocking Force powers essentially means free healing for the rest

There's no alien monster there. George Lucas retroactively added it to this screenshot.

WHAT THEY SAID...

In terms of story, depth and simple humanity, it is the best RPG the Xbox has to offer. Arguably it's Xbox's best game since Halo: Combat Evolved

Xbox Nation 9/10
October 2003

of the game. At the same time though, the difficulty can spike in truly painful ways. The final battle is especially bad for that, with it being quite possible to get to Darth Malak and be completely the wrong build for a one-on-one fight. Epic *Star Wars* music blares through the speakers when the Benny Hill theme would be more suitable, as you run around in a big circle, landing cheap hits and trying to heal up for another run to whittle him down for the end cinematic.

This was, however, BioWare's first attempt at creating cinematic action, and as much as that side stumbled, it's easy to see why it continued to evolve its style through its next games. Its previous RPGs had used bird's-eye views, and most other single-player RPGs were following either the same path or had gone fully first-person. *KOTOR*'s third-person camera though was built to get right into the action, with lightsabers flaring, grenades exploding, and active-pausing making it possible to control a full party while still having access to tactical options – a power shot versus a volley of shots for instance, or a carefully thrown grenade, even as the characters flip around and clash blades and choke the life from their enemies just like in the movies. Give or take a few Will saves.

We'd never seen anything like it before in games, and BioWare made the most of it – boosting it with a little contrast. You start the game as an anonymous schmuck who isn't even allowed to think about tangling with a Dark Jedi, never mind the fact that you're pretty much in your space-pants at the time. Midway through, you're a force to be reckoned with on both your own achievements and as an in-game legend, with every battle potentially starting with the whole squad stepping up and igniting their sabers. Talk about fan-service.

Other weapons are of course available, and balanced to not be completely useless, but you just can't beat that kind of introduction. It also didn't hurt that while traditionally Light Side Force users get relatively dull powers, *KOTOR* makes it possible for anyone to use anything, at the cost of it draining far more Force points to deviate from alignment. It's not a good idea, but there are certainly enough characters who deserve a quick lightning bolt tickle prior to the most goody-goody flavour beat-down. Whatever your alignment though, *KOTOR*'s combat was seriously impressive stuff back in 2003.

IT SHOWS ITS AGE, BUT ALSO THE HEART THAT MADE IT A CLASSIC IN THE FIRST PLACE

THERE IS ALWAYS A TRY

For old-school BioWare fans, this turned out to be somewhat

bittersweet. While the company actually started by making two action games (goofy shooter *MDK 2* and the mech game *Shattered Steel*), it was the Infinity Engine RPGs that made it an industry darling – *Baldur's Gate*, its sequel, and by extension the games that were based on the technology like *Planescape Torment* and *Icewind Dale*, which BioWare didn't make but were rolled into its karmic CV anyway. Its games were far from the most hardcore RPG experiences ever made, but they got closer than most of the time, and can even claim some credit for restoring the genre to prominence at the end of the Nineties.

After *KOTOR* though, BioWare's march towards the mainstream became unstoppable. *Dragon Age* was intended to head back to its roots, but the sequel wasted little time bouncing back again, while *Mass Effect* went from fighting an internal battle between shooting and RPG mechanics to just throwing up its hands and becoming a pure cover-shooter.

The biggest sadness for *KOTOR* fans though remains *KOTOR 3*, the game that we'll now never get. Instead, *The Old Republic* sold itself as being *KOTOR 3* through 12 or so, though single-player fans might disagree. A few murmurs have surfaced over the years of what it was going to be though, which was to finish Revan's story with the idea that he (for he's canonically male) and *KOTOR 2*'s character (canonically female) would join together to battle a 'true' Sith empire from another part of the galaxy. These wouldn't simply be guys in Nazi-style uniforms, but 'True' Sith, with slave races and Force mastery, described in similar terms to *Babylon 5*'s Shadows. This all plays out in some form as part of *The Old Republic*'s backstory, with Revan returning in a failed attempt to raise a droid army to fight the Emperor in one of the game's Flashpoints (dungeons). The ultimate end of his tale has yet to be told.

The disappointment over the lack of a proper *KOTOR 3* though is arguably one of the finest compliments that can be paid the original. It broke ground for BioWare, turning it from a beloved studio into a studio to be reckoned with, and gave the *Star Wars* series a shot in the arm at a time when many fans were recoiling from the prequel films and the sight of T-Shirts with Jar Jar Binks' face on them. Over a decade later, it's still an RPG that demands as much respect as it showed fans and the franchise alike – a classic that shows its age, but also the heart that made it a classic in the first place.

THE BEST BITS OF KOTOR

THE DESTRUCTION OF TARIS

On a strictly dramatic level, the villains glassing this tutorial planet just to kill you really raises the stakes. But mostly, it's because Taris is awful, so seeing it burn is actually darkly satisfying. On the PC version of *KOTOR*, there's even a patch to skip the planet entirely.

ANYTHING THAT HK-47 SAYS

He's just a quote factory. As just one random example: "Explanation: You have all these squishy parts, master. And all that water! How the constant sloshing doesn't drive you mad, I have no idea..."

THE EVIL ACADEMY

The Evil Academy is a rare chance to get up close and personal with the baddies, as the team has to try to keep its hands clean in a sick school for Sith. Or not so clean, depending on your moral tastes.

DARTH REVAN

Your identity is built up to via a series of mysterious flashes and hints of something going on long before the big reveal. When it comes, though, it's very obvious in retrospect, yet it's still utterly brilliant.

THE DARK SIDE

KOTOR plays it both ways, with the chance to redeem Bastila after she falls, or embrace it yourself. It's not a fun thing to deal with either way though, and blood can be spilled even with good intentions.

RETROS

SUPER STAR WARS: RETURN OF THE JEDI SNES [JVC] 1995

While we're also big fans of *Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*'s hand-severing climax, it was this elongated encounter that pitted Leia – decked in her fan-teasing slave girl garb – against her slimy captor in the sequel that we decided to go for.

Battling through the disorienting bowels of Jabba the Hutt's sail barge, *Return Of The Jedi*'s level design and fast-and-loose approach to the hallowed lore never ceased to frustrate. Nevertheless, the final encounter between Vader's offspring and the hedonistic slug more than makes up for it. As Max Reebo's band stare motionlessly in the background, Jabba's barrage of attacks – vomiting frog snacks and thrusting his dais into Leia – leave the Princess nowhere to run. Heck, even Salacious Crumb jumps in to land a few blows. Honestly, if anyone ever deserved a good throttling, it's this freak.

WHY I ♥...

SimCity 2000

OCEAN QUIGLEY, JELLYGRADE

I'd have to say that the game that was most important to me, and that made me want to make games in the first place, is SimCity 2000 *from Will Wright and Fred Haslam. That game opened my eyes to what you could do in games, to the breadth and richness that was possible. I had no idea that you could tackle a subject as out-there as city planning, and make it engaging! I love FPSs as much as anybody else, but the idea of doing games about the real world around us was so inspiring. It opened up a world of potential.*

After playing with it for a month or so, I decided that I had to go and work at Maxis, and that was the start of my career as a game developer. I've loved other games too – everything by Kenji Kaido, for example, but it was SimCity 2000 *that lit a fire under me.*

"After playing with it for a month or so, I decided that I had to go and work at Maxis"

OCEAN QUIGLEY, JELLYGRADE

GAME CHANGERS

MORTAL KOMBAT

Released: 8 October 1992 **Publisher:** Virgin (EU), Midway Games (US) **Developer:** Midway Games (Arcade), Acclaim Games (Consoles)
System: Arcade, Amiga, Sega MegaDrive, SNES

Ed Boon and John Tobias' decapitated heads can be seen impaled on spikes at the bottom of The Pit stage – possibly the best developer cameo ever?

The original video(game) nasty, Mortal Kombat has had a much bigger impact on the games industry than is immediately evident - we examine how a game built in under a year shaped gaming forever

THERE ARE FEW games franchises as notably controversial as *Mortal Kombat* – it was one of the first videogames to divide gamers and the mainstream press, its bloody depiction of one-on-one violence a step too far for some of the more conservative commentators when it was released in late 1992. Arriving first on arcade machines, the game that would go on to spawn a slew of proper sequels and licensed spin offs (and some *terrible* movies...) almost wasn't made at all.

In 1991, Midway tasked developers Ed Boon and John Tobias with creating a fighting game that could be put together and ready for release within a year – presumably to cash in on the hype that Capcom's *Street Fighter II* had initiated a year earlier. Ten months later, the game was ready – an initial development team of four people taking on the bulk of development. Impressive considering the whole game is crammed into 8mb of data, with a 64-colour palette and 300 animations per each of the seven characters.

On top of that, *Mortal Kombat* also introduced its unique five-button control scheme that has since become a standard in the series. A series of incredibly basic light attacks are complemented by launchers, low moves and supers – all of which use simple left, right, up or down inputs, unlike *Street Fighter*'s quarter- and half-circles. This, along with the relatively shallow move pools, made it far easier for casuals to pick up than its genre rival: another reason the game quickly gained mass popularity.

AFTER SUCCESS IN the arcades, *Mortal Kombat*'s name began to circulate around gaming circles and, inevitably, the media – it matched even its inspirational peer, *Street Fighter II*, in terms of popularity, by 1993. Of course, the ultra-violence and over-the-top executions garnered the most attention; with international press claiming the game glorifies murder and violence. It's comic book violence, sure – something the action movies of the time easily

THE ANATOMY OF MORTAL KOMBAT

MORTAL KOMBAT HAS GONE ON TO INSPIRE A GREAT GLUT OF GAMES, BUT WHAT LED TO ITS CREATION IN THE FIRST PLACE?

STREET FIGHTER II

★ *Street Fighter II*, Capcom's seminal fighting game, directly caused *Mortal Kombat*'s creation. When Midway's rival launched, Capcom went as far as advertising *Street Fighter* as the superior fighting title in an attempt to stem *Mortal Kombat*'s very impressive sales rush.

JAPANESE MYTHOLOGY

★ In the very early stages of the game's development, the studio had named Liu Kang 'Minamoto no Yoshitsune' – a name later dropped by Boon because he "just couldn't deal with the name". Goro, too, came from a Japanese myth – based on Rokurokubi: demons with stretchy heads.

MIDWAY'S SCHEDULE

★ The reason that *Mortal Kombat* had such a short time in development (only ten months) was because Midway only ever intended it to be a stop-gap in its other arcade plans... this then allowed Ed Boon and John Tobias free rein on the project, and, as they say, the rest is history!

outclassed – but being able to enact it *yourself* didn't sit too well with a lot of people, especially the parents of children who would wander into arcades and play the game without any kind of supervision.

The press backlash against the game's trademark 'Fatality' finishers was in full swing by the time the game was ready to move into the home console market. For publishers, this was a tantalising opportunity: all news is good news, and during the Nintendo Vs. Sega console wars of the early Nineties, Sega executives were licking their lips at the opportunity to get one over on their Nintendo rivals. Sensing the hunger for the blood and violence *Mortal Kombat* offered in the now-maturing games community, Sega cannily released the home version on the MegaDrive with the 'Arcade Edition' dub: something Nintendo's tame, bloodless, murder-less version didn't on the SNES.

The result? Sega saw their market share climb to 55% in 1993, the first time Sega had ever pulled ahead of Nintendo in the console war, with thanks to some particularly aggressive advertising on Sega's part ("Genesis does what Nintendon't" was a genuine slogan used at the time). Sega had tapped into that anarchic, 'screw the man' rebellious nature of the Nineties with much aplomb.

MORTAL KOMBAT'S BLOODY DEPICTION OF ONE-ON-ONE VIOLENCE WAS TOO MUCH FOR SOME COMMENTATORS

KEY FACTS

- *Mortal Kombat* mainstay Jonny Cage was supposed to be a virtual version of Jean-Claude Van Damme (hence the 'JC' initials) but the actor dropped out during negotiations... leaving a parody in his place
- The game went through the names *Kumite*, *Dragon Attack*, *Death Blow* and *Fatality!* before the developers finally settled on *Mortal Kombat* after someone mysteriously wrote a K over the C on a drawing board
- *Mortal Kombat* veteran Raiden was based on the character Lightning in *Big Trouble In Little China*

■■■ TRANSIENT PROFITS ARE all well and good, but the decision to release the game uncensored would return to haunt Sega and Acclaim when their game was taken to the Supreme Court under accusation of being 'a menace to America's children'. Sega executives believed the case was pushed to court by Nintendo, though no solid proof of this exists.

Without *Mortal Kombat* bringing the 'problem' with violent videogames to the attention of the general public, we wouldn't have the Entertainment Software Association (a body that started out as the Independent Digital Software Association). From lobbying in Washington to fighting censorship, the ESA vowed to self-regulate, setting up the ERSB ratings system – which influenced our European PEGI (Pan European Game Information) – and even led to the creation of E3.

Since then, aside from a little in-fighting between hardware manufacturers, the games industry has been largely united in its drive to present games as equal to other media. Without *Mortal Kombat* setting a very graphic precedent in what games *could* get away with, it's likely the industry might have travelled a safer path, making smaller ripples before ever hitting a level where the American senate had to take them seriously as a form of entertainment. It's quite ironic for a game built in ten months, really, but without *Mortal Kombat*, this industry would be nowhere near as developed as it is today.

GAME CHANGERS

MORTAL KOMBAT'S BLOODIEST MOMENTS

THE ORIGINAL MORTAL KOMBAT IS THE REASON OUR INDUSTRY IS BOUND BY A SELF-IMPOSED RATINGS SYSTEM... BUT THAT GAME'S VIOLENCE AND GORE WAS JUST THE BEGINNING. DON'T SCAN THIS PAGE IF YOU DON'T WANT ANY HIGH-OCTANE NIGHTMARE FUEL...

SUB-ZERO'S SPINE RIP FATALITY

THIS FATALITY WAS actually referenced explicitly in the court case brought against Midway and Sega in 1993. It even inspired Senator Lieberman (opposing Sega) to quote "I was startled [...] And at the end, if you really did well, you'd get to decide whether to decapitate...how to kill the other guy, how to pull his head off. There was all sorts of blood flying around."

FALLING INTO THE PIT

THE SECOND ITERATION of The Pit (it was the keystone stage of the first game) was much more imposing and terrifying than the first. It was the first time the *Mortal Kombat* series deviated from its side-on view, instead opting for an overhead view as your opponent plummeted to the ground, before that spine-shattering *crunch* audio effect... which we can still hear today.

KUNG LAO'S HAT SPLIT

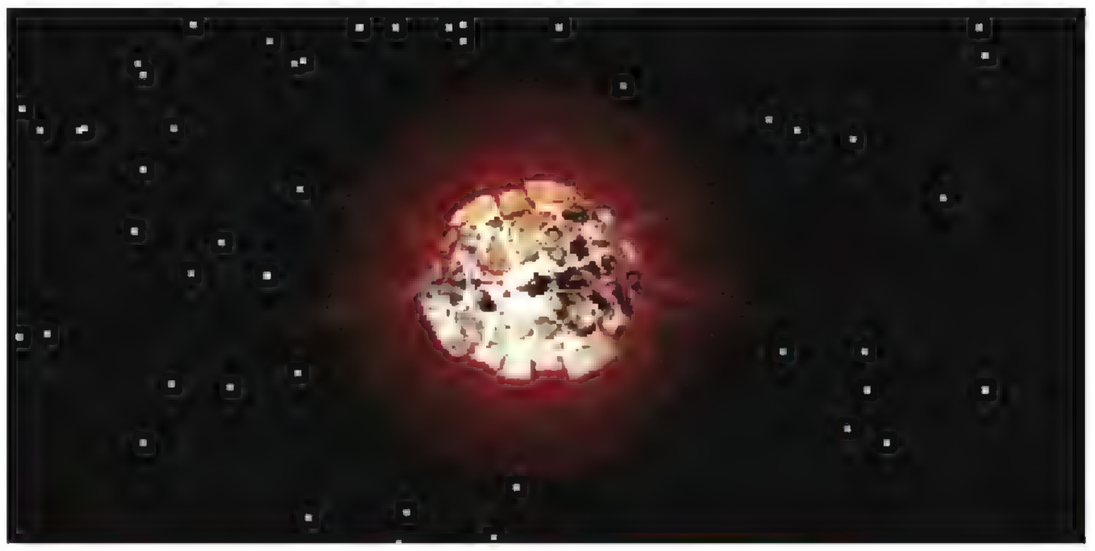
WHEN DEVELOPING THE second *Mortal Kombat*, the developers wanted to include everything they planned for the first game, but didn't have time due to scheduling. As a result, new characters, fatalities and stages were introduced. The best one (and one of creator Ed Boon's favourites) was Kung Lao splitting an opponent in half with his weirdly sharp hat.

REPTILE'S ACID SPEW

AFTER HIS WEIRD cameo in the first game, Reptile graduated to legitimate playable character by the time *Mortal Kombat II* hit the shelves. His fatality involved spewing acid onto the opponent, melting them to the bones. Because of this, the game was banned in Germany and censored in Japan, the first time a Western game was censored in the country.

KABAL'S TERRIFYING FACE

KABAL MADE HIS debut in *Mortal Kombat III*. He was supposedly horribly disfigured, leading to his reliance on a respirator and a mask that protects his face. One of his first fatalities involved the removal of his mask, to reveal a face so horrifying that it *literally* scares the soul out of his opponent.



EXPLODING YOURSELF, YOUR ENEMY... AND THE EARTH

SMOKE HAS ALWAYS been strange, his whole existence merged with the Sub-Zero moniker and the ninja brothers that go with it. Smoke's even weirder moves culminate in him firing a bajillion grenades out of himself and causing the world to explode.

MEAT'S VERY EXISTENCE

ONE OF *MORTAL KOMBAT 4*'s hidden characters, Meat is supposed to be an experimental subject that escaped Shang Tsung's custody before whatever cruel intentions of the mad sorcerer were fulfilled. Completing all Group Mode challenges in *4* would make any character you select become Meat – so you couldn't escape him and his rotting flesh and his hanging eye.

THE REBOOT'S 'X-RAY' MOVES

DURING THE PR campaign for what the media would come to call *Mortal Kombat 9*, Ed Boon promised fans of the AWOL franchise that when they finally got the new game, they'd bask in its violent glory – promising it would be the most violent yet. Boon wasn't lying – fatalities aside, the 'X-Ray' moves alone could have satiated our gore-hunger.

THE LIVING FOREST STAGE DEATH

THE LIVING FOREST is a staple arena in the *Mortal Kombat* series now, after being introduced in the second game. But it took until the ninth instalment of the core series – which travelled to a very self-aware 'reboot' timeline – for the game to allow you to kick an opponent into the trees, getting them crunched to bits by splintery wooden teeth...

QUAN CHI'S NEW FATALITY

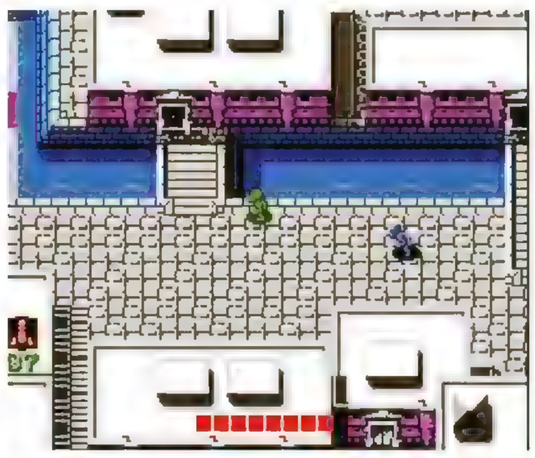
WE ONLY NEEDED to see mere snippets of *Mortal Kombat X* to get an idea of what to expect. The new graphics make all the blood and gore look more real than ever, and the result is some tremendously cringe-inducing fatalities. The worst so far? Quan Chi summons a dagger and drags his opponent onto it with his psychic powers, spins them round and splits their body in half.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

The notorious sewer-dwelling crime fighters have been a videogame mainstay for decades. We take a look back at the courageous adventures of everyone's favourite heroes in a half shell

THERE ISN'T AN Eighties-born child that wasn't aware of the pop culture whirlwind that was *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Introduced in comic books in 1984, Leonardo, Michelangelo, Donatello and Raphael would later star in a series of successful movies, a popular animated television show and a litany of videogame adaptations that helped satiate the appetite of the avid Turtlemaniacs. It was publisher Konami that established the adolescent anthropomorphic turtles as a gaming force to be reckoned with over 25 years ago, setting the template for some of the most entertaining side-scrolling beat-'em-ups of the era. But it wasn't always easy being green, with the bandana-clad vigilantes failing to evolve alongside the medium. Nevertheless, with a potent combination of nostalgia and an inimitable ability for resurrection, we take a look back at the enduring videogame legacy of those pizza-loving crime fighters. Cowabunga.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 1989

SYSTEM: NES

Konami won the rights to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* after multiple publishers aggressively vied for the licence during the Eighties, and it subsequently delivered one of the all-time best-selling titles on the NES. And it's easy to see why, with all four turtles battling across myriad colourful environments, featuring a deluge of weaponry to utilise against a horde of familiar enemies. It was influenced in no small part by *Zelda II: The Adventure Of Link*, with the gameplay split between an overhead view of the navigable world map and a side-scrolling perspective once a turtle enters a building. In later years it became as reviled as it was revered, due to its frustrating design shortcomings. Often stages demanded impossible gaps to be traversed that, if missed, dropped players back at the start of a room, respawning enemies for their troubles. Later levels let you rescue previously fallen turtles, but not many players back then could claim to have survived far past the second mission (especially with the lack of save function).

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 1989

SYSTEM: HANDHELD

Konami released several handheld games based on *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* in a broad stroke of marketing to compensate for the relative infancy of the home videogame market. The gameplay was unique enough that Konami filed a patent, and while the few modes, basic animations and crude combat haven't aged well, it remains another inspired artefact of the Turtles' media supremacy. It was released a few years later in Europe under the family-friendly 'Hero Turtles' branding.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE ARCADE GAME 1989

SYSTEM: ARCADE

The original arcade *Turtles* release not only set the template for the franchise on multiple formats but also influenced several four-player coin-ops that would later dominate arcades. The four-player co-operative play alone made the side-scrolling beat-'em-up an alluring prospect and the use of the animated series' visual style, humour and enemies solidified its appeal. One of the more impressive features is the distinct mechanics of each character: Donatello is slow but powerful, Michelangelo and Raphael possess faster attacks but at a shorter range, while Leonardo is a general all-rounder. Matched with interactive environments and engaging cut-scenes, it's one of the best arcade titles of its time. It was later ported to home consoles, most notably to NES where it received two extra stages and mixed around some of the later boss battles to include bespoke villains. While considerable effort was taken to make the port a worthwhile home console release, the significantly reduced graphics and lack of four-player multiplayer meant it paled in comparison to the coin-op. Nevertheless, Konami understood the match-up of simplistic 2D brawling and the *Turtles* licence was a lucrative one and the formula has rarely been altered since.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II: SPLINTER SPEAKS 1990

SYSTEM: HANDHELD

While more-or-less featuring the same gameplay as the previous handheld, the second LCD game had a novel feature wherein Turtles (and possibly Splinter!) would shout encouragement through the speaker.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: FALL OF THE FOOT CLAN 1990

SYSTEM: GAME BOY

The first Game Boy *Turtles* title is a slimmed-down version of the previous side-scrolling beat-'em-ups. Once again Shredder and Krang have kidnapped April O'Neil and the reptilian heroes have to battle through five stages to thwart their evil schemes. There's a lack of fun, but plenty of pizza.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: WORLD TOUR 1990

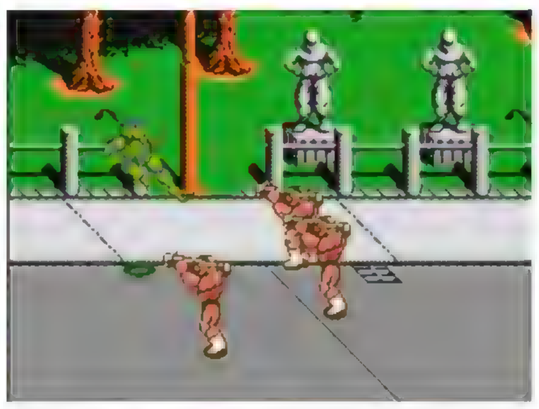
SYSTEM: AMIGA, AMSTEAD, ATARI ST, COMMODORE 64, DOS, ZX SPECTRUM

Part of a series of computer colouring books created by defunct developer Brian A. Rice, Inc. (it also produced similar Electronic Crayon titles featuring Mario and Sesame Street), this *Turtles*-themed instalment features 30 pictures of famous landmarks to colour in, including the Kremlin, Taj Mahal and the Alps.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MANHATTAN MISSIONS 1991

SYSTEM: DOS

Konami got a bit lost tonally with this straight-up 2D brawler. Lifting several elements from the original Mirage comic book series, but including several notable additions made by the animated television show, the result is a grim rendition of the usual *Turtles* adventure. *Manhattan Missions* is also notable for being the first videogame to feature an appearance from fan-favourite Casey Jones.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III: THE MANHATTAN PROJECT 1991

SYSTEM: NES

The third *Turtles* game to appear on the NES, *The Manhattan Project* utilises the same basic mechanics as its arcade-originating predecessor. A few twists make the gameplay more compelling, most notably the Turtles' individual special moves and an alternative game mode that enables players to fight one another, both of which contributed to a far superior sequel in every regard. Sadly, it was never released in Europe.

"THE FIRST GAME TO FEATURE THE NOTORIOUS PIZZA MONSTER"

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II: BACK FROM THE SEWERS 1991

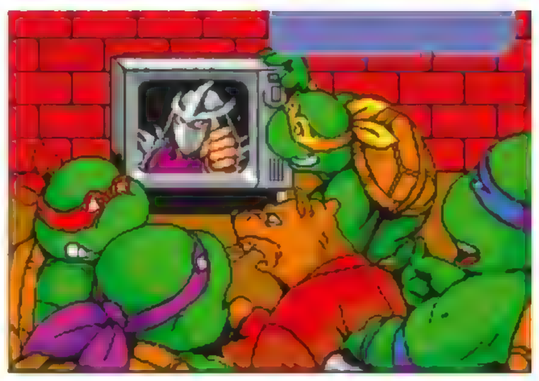
SYSTEM: GAME BOY

Konami was more ambitious with its second *Turtles* Game Boy release, adding more open environments, harder enemies and exciting set-pieces. This was also the first game to feature the notorious Pizza Monster.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III: SHREDDER'S LAST STAND 1991

SYSTEM: HANDHELD

Another LCD game in the popular line of handheld electronic games, this time released by Tiger Electronics. Rather hilariously the game doesn't actually feature Shredder.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: TURTLES IN TIME 1991

SYSTEM: ARCADE, SNES

The follow-up to the original arcade title remains the most revered entry in the *Turtles'* videogame saga. Praised for its wider range of gameplay mechanics, hugely dynamic levels and enhanced visuals and sound – the latter mostly consisting of original music, although it did feature 'Pizza Power', which was taken from a TMNT live concert. The SNES port was equally as celebrated for encapsulating the essence of the television show. It added new bosses (seemingly it was unheard of to release a home console *Turtles* game without the inclusion of Bebop and Rocksteady) and exclusive stages to the new Nintendo iteration, alongside additional game modes. *Turtles In Time* doesn't just mark the apex of the brand's videogame legacy, but can be identified as one of the most influential and defining titles within its genre.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: BASKETBALL 1991

SYSTEM: HANDHELD

Everyone knows that the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles love nothing more than relaxing by playing a bit of basketball. Oh, wait, nobody knows that, except for maybe three people who bought this odd Turtles-starring sport handheld.

DEDICATED CONSOLES

The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles didn't just appear on various consoles over the years, but starred on their own dedicated systems

THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR

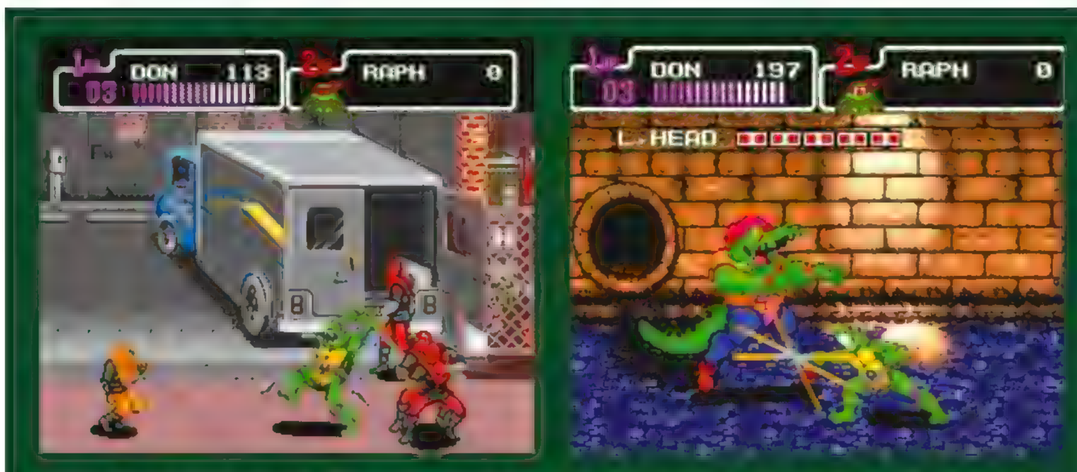
Functioning in a similar way to PlayStation EyeToy games, *The Way Of The Warrior* was a Turtles system featuring a camera that tracked player movements in the game. Featuring five modes, each is just a variation on punching things as quickly as possible.

BATTLE FOR THE CITY

Featuring four levels of basic side-scrolling brawling, the software featured on this console was developed by Wayforward Technologies. *Battle For The City* is the only one of the three consoles that provides a gaming experience that can be considered worthwhile.

MUTANT AND MONSTER MAYHEM LASER BLASTER

A big plastic light gun game, *Mutant And Monster Mayhem* is lacking in substance and longevity. All-in-all it's by far one of the most tenuous pieces of interactive Turtles merchandise ever produced.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE HYPERSTONE HEIST 1992

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE

After enjoying a few years as predominantly one of Nintendo's premiere third-party exclusives, the Turtle clan made their way over to Sega with *The Hyperstone Heist*. Essentially a retooled version of *Turtles In Time*, it emulates major sections of the arcade/SNES title with a twist – the opening sees the Statue Of Liberty disappearing again, this time mysteriously vanishing into thin air; levels are often an amalgamation of several *Turtles In Time* stages at once. *The Hyperstone Heist* has fewer than half the levels of *Turtles In Time*, but counterbalances that with much longer stages, more aggressive enemies and faster-moving characters. Ultimately, there's enough to differentiate the two titles that allows the Mega Drive debut of *TMNT* to stand on its own merits and lest we forget that the US release features the best *Turtles* box art of all time.

TEENAGE MUTANT HERO TURTLES: FOUR FOR FOUR 1992

SYSTEM: HANDHELD

A more stylish handheld unit than its predecessors (it looks like an octagon), *Four For Four* is another basic brawler aimed at European territories (once again using the 'Hero' title) but it unfortunately does little to evolve the format.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III: RADICAL RESCUE 1993

SYSTEM: GAME BOY

One of the more divergent titles, *Radical Rescue* is a Metroidvania-style platformer, where each turtle has their own unique ability crucial to completing the game. Players begin as Michelangelo, who has to rescue the other Turtles, Splinter and April.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: TOURNAMENT FIGHTERS 1993

SYSTEM: SNES, MEGA DRIVE, NES

Konami decided to do the vogue thing and copy-and-paste the *Street Fighter II* formula for its next *TMNT* title. *Tournament Fighters* received drastically different iterations across multiple platforms, with the SNES version being the strongest of the three. Despite the fact that it was released as the licence was losing its lustre with young gamers, it does hold a couple of notable accolades: it was the last game Konami released on the NES and the SNES version was one of the first fighting games to feature a super bar – an innovation that was ignored due to its commercial failure. Much better than gamers remember, *Tournament Fighters* is far from a licence crudely shoehorned into a genre template.

While it might not match the technical showcase of its contemporaries during the genre's boom, it's an accomplished and immensely playable fighter that remains an underrated gem.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: DIMENSION X ASSAULT 1995

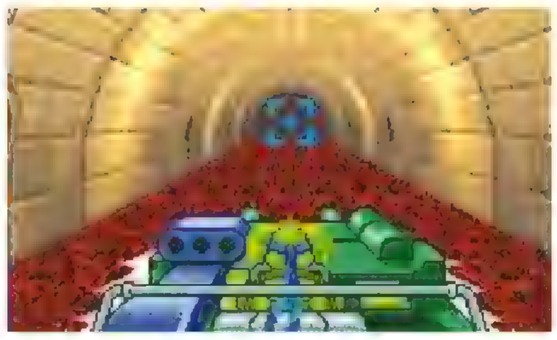
SYSTEM: HANDHELD

Another standalone handheld title that bridged the gap between Konami's first and second phase of *Turtles* games. The visuals were more inspired than handheld units released in previous years, but the gameplay itself felt antiquated by this point.

NINJA TURTLES: THE NEXT MUTATION 1997

SYSTEM: HANDHELD

The ill-fated live-action television series received its own handheld game: *The Next Mutation*. It's once again rote nonsense, but it does have the distinction of being the only *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* licenced game to feature the fifth turtle, Venus de Milo.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2003

SYSTEM: GAME BOY ADVANCE

2003 saw Konami return to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* after a new television series brought them back into the public consciousness. It's an exclusive for the Game Boy Advance and surprisingly good fun, featuring a unique set of levels for each turtle, which vary between traditional side-scrolling stages, third-person races and shooting sections. Definitely playing to the strengths of its predecessors, it was a strong return for the Ninja Turtles.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2003

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE, XBOX, PS2, PC

The first major console release in a decade, it was a disappointment by most fans' standards. It was nothing but a simple button-masher, lacking the depth and inspired design that defined its previous videogame incarnations. The only positives are the audio and visuals, which perfectly replicated the tone of the then-airing animated series.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2: BATTLE NEXUS 2004

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE, GBA, XBOX, PS2, PC

While the addition of four-player co-op made it an improvement on the last instalment, the poor controls, feeble AI and lack of variety makes it a hollow experience from beginning to end. The only saving grace is the inclusion of the original arcade game as a bonus – a reminder of how it should be done.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 3: MUTANT NIGHTMARE 2005

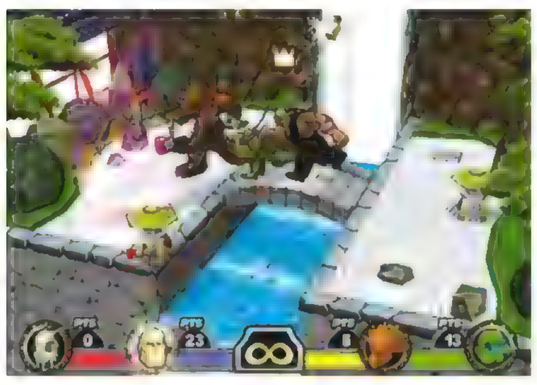
SYSTEM: GAMECUBE, NINTENDO DS, XBOX, PS2

One thing that can be said about Konami's take on the 2003 show is that it adheres closely to the revised canon. *Mutant Nightmare* is still plagued by the same technical issues and repetitive gameplay that hampered its two predecessors, but the focus on set-pieces makes it a slightly more engaging experience.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES FAST FORWARD: NINJA TRAINING NYC 2005

SYSTEM: MOBILE

The first mobile game based on *TMNT*, it's hardly a gracious debut for the fearsome foursome in what is the most monotonous platformer the clan has ever appeared in.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MUTANT MELEE 2005

SYSTEM: GAMECUBE, PS2, XBOX, PC

A novel spin-off that enables multiple *TMNT* characters to compete across four different game modes. It's largely forgettable due to the repetitive gameplay and the minuscule battlegrounds.

TMNT: PLUG 'N PLAY 2006

SYSTEM: PLUG 'N PLAY

There were three Plug 'n Play titles (controllers with pre-installed games that can be connected to televisions) that were released in 2006, all three of which were unimaginative brawlers. However, squint a little and it looked like you were playing a really tiny version of a Nineties cartoon.

TMNT: THE POWER OF 4 2007

SYSTEM: MOBILE

A tie-in to the movie released in the same year, this basic side-scroller featured some impressive animations and enough gameplay variety to make it an adequate mobile time-waster.

TMNT: NINJA ADVENTURES – MINI-GAME AND ACTIVITY CENTRE 2007

SYSTEM: PC

A platformer with screensavers and wallpapers. This kids' bundle is the videogame equivalent of a crumpled party bag with a half-eaten slice of cake inside.

TMNT 2007

SYSTEM: MULTI

Ubisoft seized the rights to *TMNT*, releasing its first major console release to coincide with the decent animated movie. Given the all-encompassing multi-platform release, the quality varies massively from console to console. The home console iterations are dull; the GBA version is the most enjoyable.

THE FLASH GAMES

The Turtles take on the internet in this series of Flash games

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Double Damage

Created to promote Ubisoft's better *TMNT: Smash-Up*, this is a basic beat-'em-up in the same vein as the original arcade game.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Dark Horizon

The first game to be based on the Nickelodeon versions of the characters! It's an entertaining but slight take on the classic brawler formula.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Sewer Run

Involving the Ninja Turtles traversing platforms, the added racing and combat elements make this an enjoyable, fast-paced breeze entry.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Throw Back!

This title is a variation on the Shredder boss battle features in the SNES *Turtles In Time*. Avoid Shredder's gunfire while taking out foot soldier goons.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Ninja Turtle Tactics 3D

A variation on the classic battle mode, this ambitious Flash title tasks the player with beating off waves of enemies that take the form of the other Turtles.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Donnie Saves A Princess

Donatello's dreaming he's having to battle through several classic games. *Mario*, *Zelda* and the original arcade title all feature in this creative comedy.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: THE NINJA TRIBUNAL 2009

SYSTEM: MOBILE

The Ninja Tribunal takes *TMNT* and gives it an RPG spin with great results. Influenced by *Final Fantasy* and *Chrono Trigger* it's a captivating concept, albeit limited by its mobile platform.

TMNT: THE SHREDDER REBORN 2009

SYSTEM: MOBILE

A direct sequel to *The Ninja Tribunal*, *The Shredder Reborn* focuses less on action and concentrates on story and exploration elements. Once again it's rough around the edges and hindered by its choice of platform.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: OUT OF THE SHADOWS 2013

SYSTEM: XBLA, PSN, PC

The first *TMNT* published by Activision, the most commendable achievement of *Out Of The Shadows* is its attempt to bring back the spirit of the arcade original. However, marred by myriad technical glitches, this sloppy, rushed game was rightfully panned on its release earlier in the year.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: TURTLES IN TIME RE-SHELLED 2009

SYSTEM: XBOX LIVE, PSN

Having failed to bring the Turtles back to gamers in any meaningful (read: financially successful) way, Ubisoft opted to give an HD touch-up to the most beloved entry in the franchise. Inevitably, it couldn't quite live up to the original game it was based on. The lack of drop-in/drop-out multiplayer was a sore point with fans and the overall art direction lacked the slickness of the Nineties version. Nevertheless, the core gameplay remained mostly unchanged (although animations were given a little extra whizz-bang). It's a testament to the timeless original that even with a few poor design decisions *Re-Shelled* is as enthralling as ever.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 2013

SYSTEM: XBOX 360, WII, 3DS

Published by Activision, this effort proved to be another commercial misfire. Even the slavish dedication to its source material and high-profile voice cast can't save the Xbox 360 version from the usual woes of repetitive combat and uninspired mission design. The 3DS iteration fares slightly better; however, the truncated campaign length and lack of meaningful challenge make it mediocre at best. Suffice to say that the Turtles' halcyon days are long since past.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: ARCADE ATTACK 2009

SYSTEM: NINTENDO DS

The Nintendo DS got its own Turtles-flavoured beat-'em-up in 2009. It takes in aspects of the original Mirage comics, as well as the most recent animated adventures into consideration in this mediocre handheld title.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MUTANTS IN MANHATTAN 2016

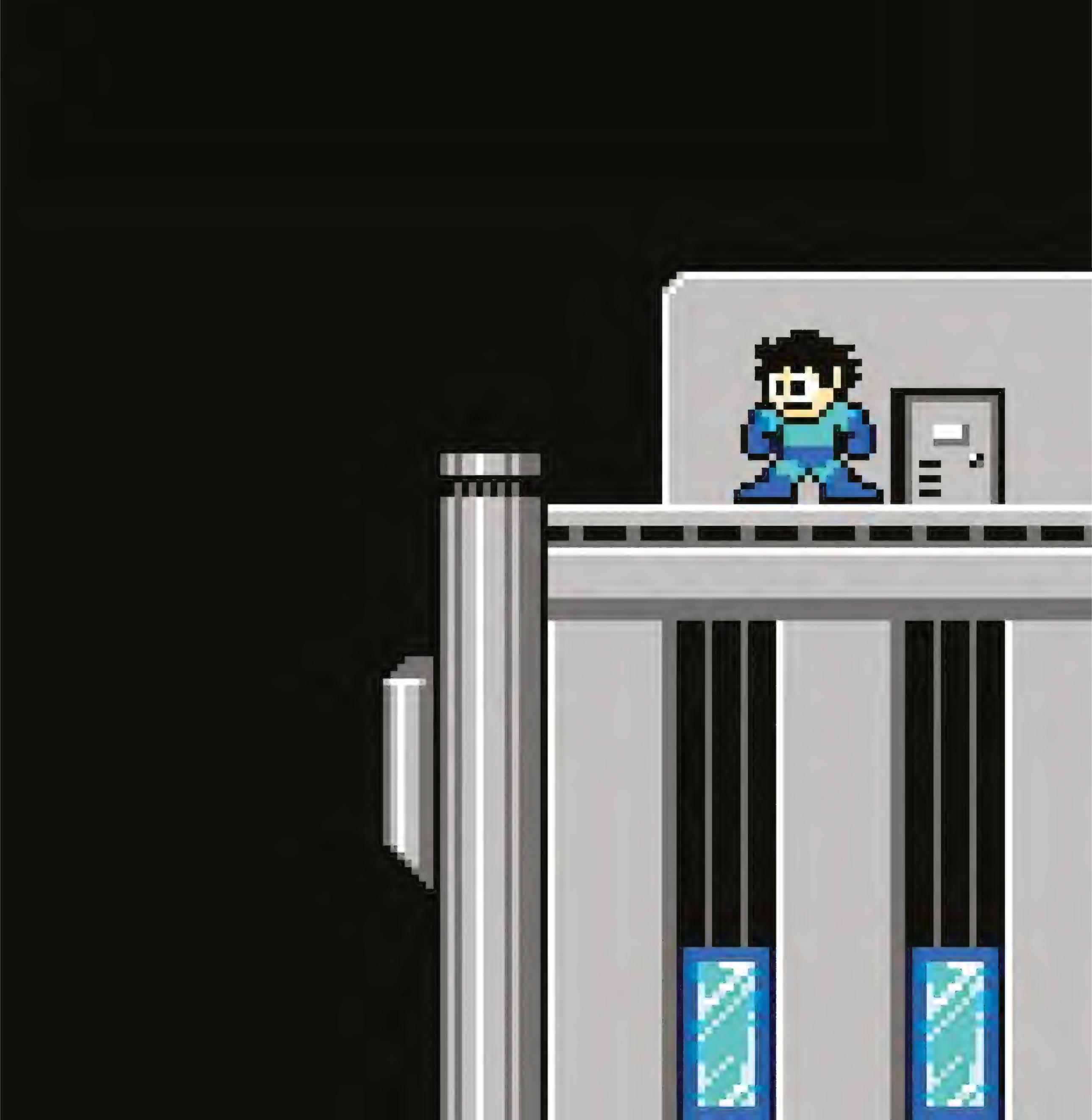
SYSTEM: VARIOUS

The first *TMNT* game released on the new generation of consoles was yet another disappointment – with the digital version being removed from digital stores less than a year after going on sale.

BEST INTRO

MEGA MAN 2
NES [CAPCOM] 1988

OFTEN THE MOST memorable openings in videogames are the ones that display the most elaborate visuals, which is why contemporary games are often celebrated loudest – case in point: *BioShock*'s maiden descent into Rapture. But even within the limited capabilities of basic console hardware (in this case the NES) developers found increasingly distinctive ways to create dynamic visual moments for players to marvel at. *Mega Man 2* does just that with only a few lines of text, flawlessly setting the scene for the ensuing experience; the camera sweeps up a skyscraper as the music swells, revealing Mega Man standing proudly atop. It's one of the most rousing moments in the history of gaming, one that can't fail to make gamers ridiculously pumped-up about what lies ahead. As far as heroic entrances go, all other videogame icons should take note.



Wipeout

BEHIND THE SCENES

WIP3OUT

It may not have flown off the shelves but Wip3out was the best of the games in the franchise to hit the PlayStation. We discover how it was made

Released: 1999
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Psygnosis
Key Staff: David Jefferies (programmer), Wayne Imlach (lead design), Nicky Wescott (lead graphics), Gary McKill (music and sound), Alan Raistrick (producer)

WHAT IS IN A NAME? Quite a lot, if that name happens to be *WipEout*, the fast-moving, futuristic racer that had hearts pulsating and fingers twitching upon its debut in 1995. Canny marketing by The Designers Republic and its unique in-game styling produced a game that transcended a still-young, nerd-labelled industry. In doing so, it put *WipEout* centre stage in bleeding-edge nightclubs and the rave-infested underground culture, ensuring the game pulled in sackfuls of dollars.

In 1999, some three years after the sequel *WipEout 2097*, developer Psygnosis, which was by now under Sony ownership, decided to revisit the game as a PlayStation exclusive. It fiddled with the name by reversing the letter E to produce a number 3 for the European version – thus creating *Wip3out* – but the game wasn't the third in the series. It was the fourth. The third had been a Nintendo 64 exclusive put out a year earlier called *Wipeout 64*. "It was seen as more of a hybrid of *WipEout* & *WipEout 2097* rather than a standalone in its own right, even though it introduced a bunch of game features unique to the N64 version, which found themselves used in later iterations," says *Wip3out* lead designer Wayne Imlach.

The success of *Wipeout 64* showed how popular the franchise had remained among gamers but the team working on *Wip3out* at Psygnosis' Leeds studio was afforded very few luxuries. It was hit with both a tight schedule and a small budget because Sony needed the game to be released before gamers gave up on the PlayStation and moved to the PS2. But for many of those involved, the opportunity was too good to pass and so they threw themselves into the task in hand with great focus.

As if to underline how tight the schedule was, the team had just nine months to get the game on to shop shelves (it was sold as *WipEout 3* in the US). "It was a very quick turnaround for a game, even considering that we had a solid foundation to start with in the previous title, *2097*," says Imlach. "Because of this, we had to be careful about features – anything too new or untried would be high risk and we couldn't afford to slip much. So the innovations were small, and the focus was put on refining what already existed. The team was also quite small relative to other games."

The first task for the team was to identify any niggles that had emerged with past games in the franchise and right them. The main problem with the very first game was its difficulty, an issue that saw a great many gamer fail to progress further than a couple of tracks before throwing their joypad down in anger at yet another stalled run. "The first game was seminal and groundbreaking, but a little rough round the edges particularly with unforgiving ship handling," says programmer David Jefferies. To address this, Imlach says the game balance was evened up, giving it a "shallower progression" than the previous games, "Yet retaining the insane skill requirements at the highest levels."

Rather than write the game from scratch, the team took *WipEout 2097* as its starting point, pulling out a development version of that game so that it had something to work on almost immediately. Imlach headed up a team of three level designers and his job was to redesign the game's basic elements and

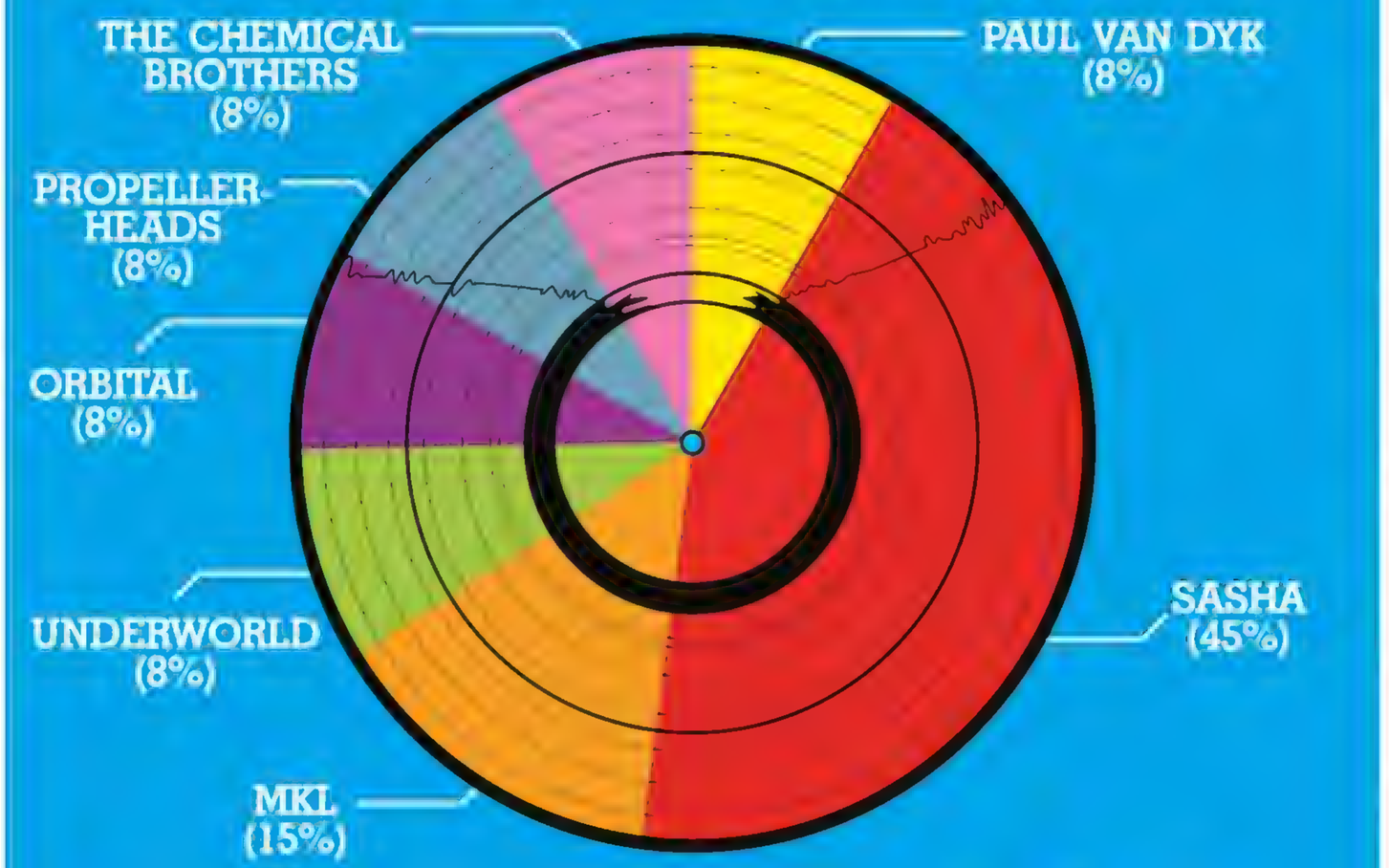
As always, the tracks would not only go straight along but corkscrew down at a blistering speed for added coolness.

LISTEN UP

DJ Sasha seized control of the music on Wip3out

THE *WIPEOUT* SERIES had already gained a reputation for its musical excellence, drawing upon the underground rave culture, which gripped the UK at that time.

With *Wip3out* DJ Sasha was asked to oversee the soundtrack and, so confident was the game's developer that people would want to listen to the tunes, the game's CD could even be played in a standard CD player. "The music was more cohesive – I think getting a single individual to mix and direct the various compositions gave the game a more focused track list, without sacrificing the techno-club soundtrack that defined the series," says lead designer Wayne Imlach on this revolutionary decision.



SASHA – Sasha was the musical director on *Wip3out* and he dominated the game's audio, contributing no fewer than six of the 13 tracks including *FEISAR*, *Icarus*, *Auricom*, *Goteki 45*, *Pirhana* and *Xpander*. He also headlined a club tour of the USA sponsored by developer Psygnosis. He told music paper *NME* at the time: "The series has always had a huge underground following – I'm certain that the crossover between the people who listen to my music and those who enjoy games like *WipEout* is enormous."

MKL – With two dance tunes – *Surrender* and *Control* – MKL's decision to switch from being a drummer to the producer of electronic music certainly paid off.

UNDERWORLD – This British electronic group had its origins in the Eighties, but it was hugely popular in the mid-Nineties thanks to the success of *Born Slippy*, a tune made famous thanks to the Danny Boyle classic movie *Trainspotting*. Underworld contributed *Kittens* to *Wip3out*.

ORBITAL – Brothers Phil and Paul Hartnoll made up the dance music duo Orbital, which recorded *Know Where To Run* for *Wip3out*. Paul must have been struck by the opportunity because, following the break up of Orbital, he went on to record tracks for the 2005 game *Wipeout Pure* on the PSP.

PROPELLERHEADS – This big-beat musical ensemble had already included the song *Bang On!* for *Wipeout 64*, so giving *Lethal Cut* to *Wip3out* was something of a natural progression.

THE CHEMICAL BROTHERS – No strangers to the *WipEout* franchise, The Chemical Brothers had allowed *Chemical Beats* to be used on the first game. *Wip3out* saw the inclusion of the tune *Influence* as well.

PAUL VAN DYK – German electronic dance music DJ Paul van Dyk is no stranger to videogames today, having produced tunes for *FIFA*, *Need For Speed*, *DJ Hero*, *Grand Slam Tennis*, *Mirror's Edge* and more, but his first taste of a gaming soundtrack came with *Avenue* on *Wip3out*.

manage the circuit design and optimisation of the game. His team was not only able to make use of a set of recently released PlayStation code optimisation utilities, but they were also able to draw on years of experience that had given them a strong insight into how far they could potentially take the PSOne.

"We felt we could really push the technical envelope of what was possible on the PlayStation, adding some features that were missing, giving the visuals a complete overhaul from The Designer's Republic but keeping to the values of the franchise so that fans of the previous games wouldn't feel alienated by the new game," says Jefferies. Imlach agrees. "One of the advantages of developing for a mature system is the refinement that comes from knowing the hardware inside out, hence the hi-res without a sacrifice of frame rate which is something that wasn't possible with the earlier iterations."

AS WITH THE previous versions of *WipEout*, the game was written first and foremost for PAL PlayStations running at 25 frames per second. It was then converted for a NTSC audience at 30fps. A side effect of this, says Jefferies, was that the NTSC versions of the game ran a little quicker at the expense of slightly lower resolution, but because the game didn't perform any timing conversions, the race clock ran faster on the NTSC version. "This explains why your race times are 20 per cent faster than your American friends," he exclaims.

But the team was also keen on using aspects of the PlayStation that development teams had previously avoided. "One of our priorities was using the PlayStation's hi-def and widescreen mode which, up to that point, had been considered unusable by development teams," explains Jefferies. "By optimising the renderer we were able to increase the resolution of the game from the standard 256 x 240 to 512 x 256, which made for a much crisper image."

An interesting side effect of running the game in a widescreen 512 x 256 was that the technique allowed for the rendering of two perfectly square split screens side-by-side rather than the usual top and bottom. Each split screen was therefore 256 x 256, "Or to put it another way, they were both the same resolution as single screen *Wipeout 2097* and running on the same hardware. Impressive stuff," enthuses Jefferies.

The split-screen functionality allowed for one-TV multiplayer, an advance on the original version that

The graphical boundaries of the PlayStation were pushed with *Wip3out*, producing a game that was both high-res and fast.

It was possible to view the game from a first-person perspective, which actually made getting around the tracks much easier for many.

WHAT THEY SAID...

WipEout 3 is the most difficult and intense racing game I've played. A powerful effort from Psygnosis' Leeds studio

Gamers' Republic, 1999

required players to connect two PlayStations via a serial cable in order to play against friends. "The drawback with the old system was that you needed two tellies, two PlayStations and two copies of the game – all in one room, which limited the number of people who could experience it, especially given the weight of old CRT tellies back then – they were not easy to carry around your friend's house," Jefferies exclaims humorously.

BUT BRINGING THIS mode to the game posed problems of its own. Taking a game that wasn't designed for split screen and adding it is a major undertaking because the console needs to render two views when the game is optimised to run at exactly 30fps in one view. "With split-screen the game is still rasterising the same number of pixels as a single screen but it needs to transform twice the number of polygons into 3D space before doing the rasterising," says Jefferies.

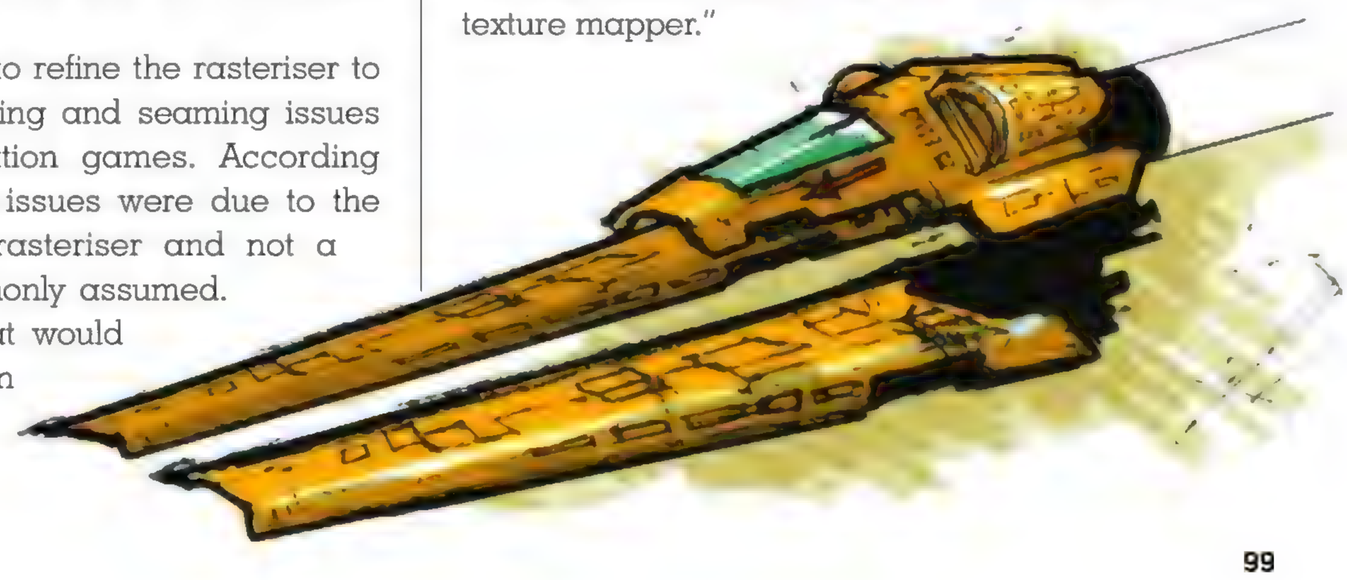
Yet the *Wip3out* team managed to crack the issue with a few optimisation tricks to improve the speed. "Ships in the distance would be rendered at a lower polygon resolution than ones nearby," Jefferies adds. "Seeing as the polygon count of the ships was fairly small anyway, this meant they turned into little wedges of cheese in the mid-distance but with all the carnage going on you rarely noticed.

The team was also able to refine the rasteriser to eliminate the polygon clipping and seaming issues that had plagued PlayStation games. According to Jefferies, many of these issues were due to the PlayStation having a 2D rasteriser and not a 3D rasteriser as was commonly assumed. "It had some hardware that would transform the polygon vertices into 3D space, but when it came to rasterise the polygons, it discarded any notion of depth and perspective and rasterised the triangles as 2D textures," he says.

"It was this that caused the textures to 'swim' unconvincingly as they approached the camera. These artefacts were compounded by the hardware's inability to clip polygons as they approach the camera

WE FELT WE COULD REALLY PUSH THE TECHNICAL ENVELOPE OF WHAT WAS POSSIBLE ON THE PLAYSTATION

clip plane. This caused polygons to flick off and disappear when they got too close to the camera. Texturing and clipping problems were particularly bad for racing games because having a low-down camera travelling down a track at speed exacerbated these issues. Our rendering engineer Pete Bratcher did a great job in rewriting the renderer that came with the Sony libraries to clip polygons correctly and adjust for the lack of perspective in the texture mapper."



STAYING ON TRACK

From 20 to 8: how the Wip3out designers chose the best courses

TRACK DESIGN is one of the key elements to absolutely any racing game, so it comes as no surprise to learn that the *Wip3out* team took it very seriously. The artists produced around 20 tracks in total, but just eight of those were chosen for the main game, a process which entailed much play-testing by the team to ensure that the tracks were as perfect as reasonably possible.

According to lead designer Wayne Imlach, the criteria for selection was not only down to overall skill requirements, "But to provide advantages and disadvantages to the different craft manufacturers with tighter tracks favouring the slower yet nimbler ships." Once the tracks were chosen, "They were worked up into the final tracks with environment and buildings and spot effects and so on," continues Jefferies.

WHAT THEY SAID...

> From the tastefully minimalist front-end graphics (laden with Designer's Republic intervention as in the rest of the game) to the flawless injection-moulded smoothness of the tracks, supremacy of construction is in evidence everywhere
>
> **PLAY, 1999**

While the programming team got to grips with the engine, the audio crew began amassing the tunes. *Wip3out* took a slightly different approach to the music and it enlisted the superstar trance DJ Sasha to be the music director. Why? "Well, 1999 was the year of trance after all," says Jefferies. "He produced a selection of great tracks for us to use in the game, including *Xpander,* which did pretty well in the charts at the time. It was great working with him and he came to Leeds and met the team and got very involved. He went on a Global Underground tour where he projected videos of the game playing behind him as he DJed and there were some great times going to see Sasha play his *Wip3out* gig at Creamfields. Some of us even made it over to see him play Space in Ibiza."

MEANWHILE, THE ART and design crew worked on a new set of tracks. Nicky Wescott was the head artist and she had been team leader on the first two titles. Her boyfriend, who later became her husband, was Mike Place who worked at The Designers Republic and carried out the graphic design of the game. "So right from the beginning it was like DR was on the team, which was massively important," adds Jefferies.

The levels were initially built with no dressing whatsoever – just basic polygon tracks floating in space. The artists started "by lofting a racing line in SoftImage and exporting it into the game engine," says Jefferies, of a drafting technique that allows for the generation of curved lines. "You could race the tracks at this point but, visually, they looked like a ribbon of track going through space with no background."

This was done because the team felt it was important to get the racing aspect feeling right before spending any time on set dressing, as changes to the layout would be expensive once scenery was built. "We spent quite a bit of time analysing the tracks from the earlier games and we derived a short 'track design bible' that highlighted the pros and cons of all the various track features you could include, including items, such as the width of the track, angle of corners, altitude changes, everything," recalls Imlach. "If you put something into the track design, there was an expectation of knowing to some degree how it might affect the game before you tested it. We didn't have time for random design. You needed to know what you were doing and have a reason for every corner, curve and crossover."

The visual style was similar to the previous *WipEout* games, producing a cool, underground, almost Japanese feel to the tracks.

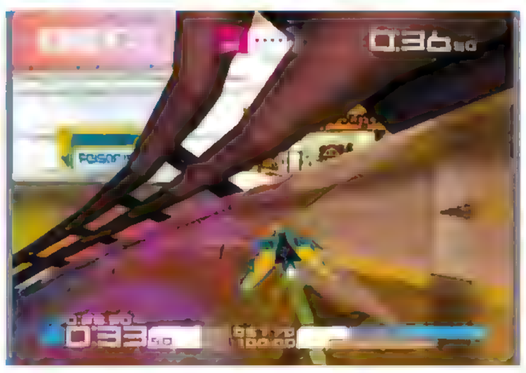
THE TEAM HAD JUST NINE MONTHS TO GET THE GAME INTO SHOPS

The artists distinguished the game from *WipEout 2097* by using a different palette and cleaner lines, helped by the hi-res mode, but the game still conveyed the futuristic cityscapes and environments that defined the look of the game. "I think it felt a little more mature in terms of art style, which was appropriate as it was the last of the series to come out on the generation of consoles it was originally created on," says Imlach. As a bonus, four more unlockable test tracks were produced late in development "using the vector art style as a cheap way to introduce more tracks without the art overhead," Imlach adds.

Wip3out was also given a replay function because the team believed that the high-speed races deserved

> A GAMING EVOLUTION WipEout > Wip3out > G-Surfers

With its styling, club music and fast paced action, *WipEout*'s futuristic spacecrafts – and insane difficulty – become iconic.



G-Surfers had undisputed parallels with *Wip3out* including a two-player split screen mode and modern craft.

to be viewed from different camera angles. Jefferies says the technical concept behind replays on the PlayStation was simple – "you recorded each button that the user pressed on each frame and then, for the replay, you simply played back each button press and the race would unfold exactly the same as it did the first time round" – but, in practice, retro-fitting replays to a game that didn't support them proved to be an immensely fiddly and frustrating task.

"All of the physics, artificial intelligence and random number generation had to be exactly deterministic, which is never the case," he recalls. "If you feed the same values into an AI system twice then you might expect it to give you the same result each time but, in practice, AI and physics systems have a degree of randomness built into them to make them unpredictable, so when you try and replay a race it looks different to first time around. When you add to this the fact that extensive randomness is used throughout the particle systems – which are different depending on camera angle (and of course camera angle is different in a replay) – then it becomes a huge spaghetti mess that you have to untangle to achieve this feature."

NOT THAT THE end result suffered. Indeed, replays looked great and the process was so efficient that the team was able to use some of the spare processing time to put some flare and trail effects on the ships. The look and feel of the game was stunning with the futuristic graphic design championed by The Designers Republic and a render engine displayed to its full potential. "The whole package ended up working very well together and consequently the game came away with the Best Design award at BAFTA for 1999," says Jefferies proudly.

The game coincided with the advent of the analogue controller and so, for the first time, the series was able to benefit from added support for these sticks. It had proven to be a popular control method and, given Sony's influence on *Wip3out*, it was something the coding team could not afford to dismiss. Even so, it was a controversial inclusion. "The nature of analogue input is very different to digital input and it ended up making the racing easier because analogue controls afforded the player more control over the input," admits Jefferies. "This upset some traditionalists who didn't like us releasing a version of the game where better times could be gained by using the DualShock."

But it wasn't as if the game was easy. It did have a difficult learning curve and this went down well with reviewers who raved over the game in both the specialist and national press which also praised the title for its graphics, split screen, new weapons and soundtrack. And yet sales of the game were sluggish. Not even a special edition released in Europe in 2000 could make it into an overwhelming success despite bringing different craft physics, older courses and four-person multiplayer to the table. The problem, says Jefferies, was the European-centric nature of the franchise and also because attention was switching to other, more advanced machines.

"*WipEout* was always a very European and UK series and so the relatively low sales compared to titles that sold across the world wasn't that surprising," Jefferies says. It didn't help, he continues passionately, that *Wip3out* was the first PlayStation title to ship with a new form of copy protection that meant even legitimate copies of the game would not play on a modded PlayStation. "People who had modded their console had no choice but to acquire a pirated version of the game, which had the copy protection stripped from it," he says. "I don't know if this meant that we lost lots of potential sales but later titles no longer used that form of copy protection."

Of course, *Wip3out* wasn't the end of the franchise. It became Sony's baby, spawning more sequels including *WipEout Fusion*, *WipEout Pure*, *WipEout Pulse*, *WipEout HD* and *WipEout 2048*. *WipEout* games have since appeared on the PS2, the PSP, the PS3 and the PS Vita, and finally arriving on the PS4 in 2017 in the form of *WipEout: Omega Collection*. "Everyone loved *WipEout*," says Jefferies. "The slickness, the visuals, the graphic design, the music and the club culture had perfectly captured the PlayStation generation."

The overall look and feel of *Wip3out* was of a PlayStation 2 game. This was important, however, in order to sell copies at the end of the PSOne's life.

GAME CHANGERS

SPACE INVADERS

Released: 1978 **Publisher:** Taito **Developer:** In-house **System:** Arcade

The *Space Invaders* IP is technically owned by Square Enix today, since the Japanese corporation purchased a majority share in Taito in 2005.

It conquered the arcades in the Seventies and Eighties and invented a genre, but Space Invaders also became an axiom for creative engineering

THERE'S AN EXPRESSION often overused throughout videogame critique pointing towards an elusive '*Citizen Kane* moment'; a phrase that, despite its opaque and unashamedly extraneous nature, insinuates rather prophetically that – in a similar fashion to Orson Welles' seminal motion picture – *one* videogame will define its medium as a serious platform for both technical excellence and creative expressionism. Now, we're not here to debate whether such a thing exists or not, but there's clearly a flagrant injustice highlighted by the very idea that the industry is *still* to this day anticipating such a moment to arrive when it has arguably already passed. *Space Invaders*, a title that debuted in Japan in 1978, was a bold, innovative and immensely influential title that not only laid the groundwork for some of the most important industry developments to date, but to this day remains one of the purest, most enriching pieces of software ever created. It did then, as it still does now, perfectly encapsulate the iconic nature symbolised by that aforementioned hoary phrase.

When *Space Invaders* arrived in arcades back in the late Seventies, it's fair to say that no one had ever seen anything quite like it before. Arcades were teeming with cabinets that displayed a variety of experiences rooted in reality: sport simulators, racing games and the occasional Western showdown, each either tangible or derivative in some way or another. Initially creator Tomohiro Nishikado envisioned players fending off waves of tanks, warplanes and soldiers, but soon a more fantastical approach replaced the war theme – due in part to the questionable taste of exterminating waves of people, not to mention the sudden popularity in 1977 of space movies like *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* in the US. The idea of an alien onslaught captured the imagination of the public like nothing else, maybe because it explored a generation's pervasive paranoia, fear of invasion from a superior militant force and fascination with the stars, or maybe it was just because it was, unlike the majority of coin-ops of the time, original. Beyond its rudimental presentation, it was thematic in its

HOW IT INVADED PLANET EARTH

THE REASONS WHY SPACE INVADERS BECAME A PHENOMENON

INNOVATION

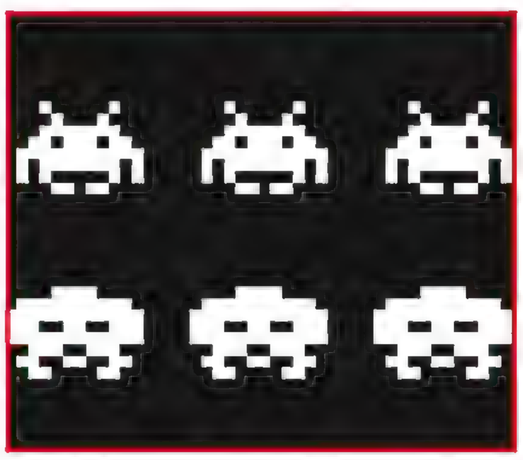
★ There was nothing like *Space Invaders* at the time of its release. It presented several fresh gameplay ideas, a sense of the fantastical and even packed in a narrative in some form. Up until that point, most gamers were used to playing racing or sports games.

CONTROVERSY

★ One accolade that mostly goes ignored by *Space Invaders* is the amount of controversy it courted after its release in the US. Newspapers ran stories about penny-pinching children, zombified youth and health issues all caused by the game. It all sounds awfully familiar...

HIGH SCORE

★ People lined up for hours for a chance to play *Space Invaders*, which is in some part due to the implementation of a scoreboard. Everyone wanted to get their name etched on the high score leaderboard. An event held by Atari in New York attracted 4,000 people in 1981.



BRANDING

★ There was something about the detailed characters that helped launch *Space Invaders* to global dominance. The extra-terrestrials and classic spaceship design spawned waves of merchandise that proved a hit in the Seventies and Eighties and chic enough for retro enthusiasts decades later.

structure with an inherent tension borne by its keen design choices. It wasn't the first game to be set in the outer reaches of the universe, but it was one of the first to understand the excitement that can be drawn from looking beyond the realm of plausibility and how the medium can utilise story effectively without compromising urgency.

MUCH OF ITS success is down to the gameplay design as it is the choice of theme, or rather how they both naturally complement one another. *Spacewar!* may predate it, but *Space Invaders* ultimately birthed the shoot-'em-up genre as we know it. Enemies falling down the screen, the player having to repel their attack with weapons, clearing the screen to progress to the next stage. It's a template that would be adapted by other arcade classics like *Galaxian*, *Phoenix*, *1942*, *Xevious* and *Galaga*, to name a few, and latterly inspire more modern examples like *Blazing Lazers*, *Raiden*, *Radiant Silvergun*, and *Ikaruga*. Oh, and then it was more-or-less adapted into the horizontal-scrolling space shooters like *Gradius* and *R-Type*. And if that's not enough, indulge us for a moment as we rattle off a few of the notable features Taito's title pioneered: it was the first arcade game where the in-game targets return fire at the player, it introduced the idea of assigning a number of lives to the player and it also popularised the concept of achieving a high score – not only that, but it was the first game that actually recorded scores to its internal memory.

It's impossible to over-emphasise how important the latter point was in both *Space Invaders*' success and its ensuing legacy. That notion of competition spurred a generation to gather around the hum of the CRT screen and compete for a place on a scoreboard, to pour coin after coin into the mechanism for another opportunity to prove their resolve and their prowess; it was a way for players to create a legacy.

The sense of community for anyone old enough to remember was infectious, rallying together around a cabinet that offered an unlimited challenge. The difficulty increase, the open-ended nature of the gameplay and the constant beckoning of the scoreboard drove players – in fact, the world – into a frenzy.

Alas, the arcade may slowly be dying – its darkened halls replaced over the years by living rooms and later fibre-optic broadband – but the ideas *Space Invaders* presented still burn bright. It didn't take long for it to invade home consoles (turning the fortunes around on the Atari 2600) and that's where it continues to stay. And while the original has been adapted, remade and reinvented multiple times over the years to varying degrees of success, it's impact is embedded in today's most lucrative franchises, celebrated indie darlings and experimental curios, so sprawling and multifarious to even attempt listing, that continue to pass on its legacy. A *Citizen Kane* moment may be a fallacy, but a *Space Invaders* one we can all believe in.

SPACE INVADERS ULTIMATELY BIRTHED THE SHOOT-'EM-UP GENRE AS WE KNOW IT

KEY FACTS

- It's rumoured that the arcade version of the game was responsible for Japan's coin shortage during its time of release.
- The Atari 2600 port of *Space Raiders* was the first home licence of a coin-op game.
- Being a good port, it was one of the Atari 2600's killer app releases and helped shift millions of consoles following the game's home release in 1980.
- *Space Invaders* introduced international markets to Japanese videogames. Previously Midway, Atari and Exidy ruled the videogaming roost.

GAME CHANGERS

THE INVASION
CHARTING THE EVOLUTION OF SPACE INVADERS IN ARCADES OVER THE YEARS

DEBUTING IN 1978, SPACE INVADERS HASN'T REALLY LEFT ARCADES IN THE YEARS SINCE. WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE MAJOR ARCADE RELEASES IN THE FRANCHISE'S HISTORY

SPACE INVADERS
1978

The original is still the best in the series with its addictive gameplay and vibrant visual staples. As we've spent the last page discussing, it pioneered modern game design to such an extent that its ideas are still prevalent today and it has been attributed with transforming the industry as a whole from a novelty into a global industry. Remarkable really, when you consider it's all the work of one man.

SPACE INVADERS PART II
1979

Released just a year later than the original *Space Invaders*, *Space Invaders Part II* is almost identical to its predecessor aside from the more colourful visuals and slightly modified gameplay. One example is the two different flying saucer types, while there are also some variations on enemy behaviour once you manage to progress past the first wave of aliens – invaders that split into two and flying saucers that drop alien reinforcements to further exacerbate proceedings.

SPACE INVADERS II (MIDWAY)
1980

Confusingly titled *Space Invaders II* – after *Space Invaders Part II* was released as *Deluxe Space Invaders* in the US – this cocktail-table iteration of the original was released in the US only. Developed in-house at Midway, it contains the first two-player mode in the series; where players can fight off alien waves together, while also trying to eviscerate each other simultaneously. A superb twist on the formula, the cabinet has been underrated in the years since (probably due to its rarity).

RETURN OF THE INVADERS
1985

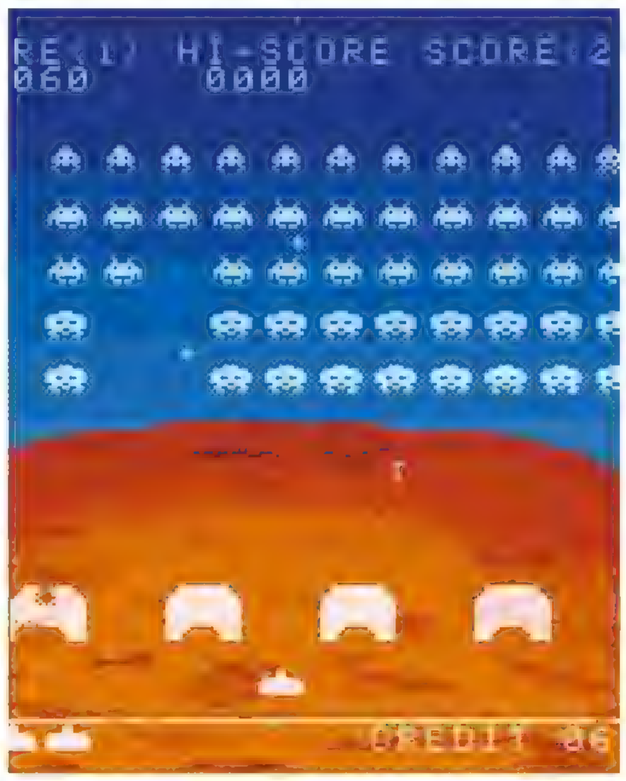
A massive leap visually for the franchise, *Return Of The Invaders* added highly detailed backdrops and superior aliens alongside improvements to AI (circling aliens!) and new challenge stages. It's moderately successful, but not all of the new ideas implemented work quite as well, or gel as seamlessly, as anything in *Space Invaders*. Nevertheless, it was the first major advancement for the series and an indication that Taito was interested in progressing the gameplay of the original.

SUPER SPACE INVADERS '91
1990

Perhaps the most fondly remembered entry in the franchise aside from the original, *Super Space Invaders '91* introduced power-ups, bosses and some offbeat challenge stages alongside a visual buff. The highlight is the cattle mutilation stage, wherein players have to protect a herd of cattle from alien attackers, before carrying the harassed bovine off to safety. Taito wouldn't shy away from humour in later instalments, but this is by far the most amusing scenario presented in any *Space Invaders* title to date.

MININVADERS
1990

Featuring precisely the same gameplay and similar black and white visuals to the original *Space Invaders*, there's nothing to really distinguish this arcade entry from Taito's 1978 release. Well, in fact there's quite a simple reason for that: *Mininvaders* was created by the developer purely for use as a test board for other coin-op cabinets that were in production. It also only appeared in Japan and was bereft of any audio output or scoring system, making for a unique yet dull affair.



SPACE INVADERS DX
1993

A fully-fleshed remake of the original boasting a range of modes (including a colour overlay version that is purposely out of alignment for fidelity's sake), it implemented a multitude of features that had appeared throughout the series in the years since the franchise debuted in 1978. However, it's most notable for introducing a parody mode that replaced the traditional *Space Invaders* sprites with characters from other classic Taito games including *Bubble Bobble*, *The New Zealand Story* and *Darius*.

SPACE INVADERS '95
1995

A departure from the more grounded visual design of previous instalments, this 1995 edition instead embraces a vibrant, cartoony aesthetic that paints the alien life forms as joyful little creatures dancing merrily towards their extermination – no doubt in a bid to skew younger (it was also subtitled *The Attack Of Lunar Loonies* in the US). Given the new art style, the use of other Taito characters (much like *Space Invaders DX*) was once again included, this time adding in the likes of Silver Hawks.

SPACE INVADERS: THE BEAT ATTACKER
2003

Space Invaders returned to the arcades in rather stylish form in 2003. Lifting its concept from arcade rhythm-action titles like *Dance Dance Revolution*, players wield a turret by stepping on three floor-mounted control panels to fire shots at aliens. Ultimately, it's a more streamlined interpretation of the original, but the innovation is in the unusual controls and it's one of the few examples of the franchise branching out to attempt something unique.

WHY I ♥ ...

Gradius

JONATHAN GORDON, EDITOR, GAMES™

The arcade shoot-em-up had plenty of groundbreaking titles in the mid-Eighties, but few can top Gradius *for its impact on the genre. It played on expectations right from the start and began to set the template for just about every game in this field that would follow. The tunnel gameplay design, the environment packed with threats and, of course, gigantic boss ships at the end of a stage to battle against. You can see the beginnings of future classics and many spin-offs in* Gradius' *early concepts.*

But perhaps the thing I love the most about Gradius, *that actually keeps it as fresh and interesting to play now as it did on release, is the customisation of power-ups. With its levelling system at the bottom of the screen, you could essentially pick how you wanted to play through sections of the game by grabbing or avoiding a pick-up. Do you want a shield or a little extra firepower? Do you want to equip a laser or move a little faster? It's pretty basic really, but it has such an impact on gameplay. A really stunning piece of game design.*

"You can see the beginnings of future classics and many spin-offs in Gradius' early concepts"

JONATHAN GORDON, EDITOR, GAMES™

BEST INTRO

ODDWORLD: ABE'S ODDYSEE
PLAYSTATION **1997**

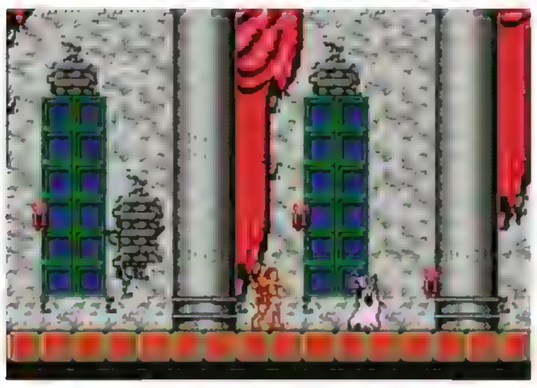
"THIS IS RUPTURE FARMS," says a nasal voice, resigned and forlorn. A mournful and haunting soundtrack plays in the background as industrial machines rumble, bloody cuts of meat are torn apart, bonesaws cut at splintered ribs. Lines of Mudokons – the enslaved race of the protagonist, Abe – stand like automata, performing their tasks with resignation, some with mouths or eyes sewn shut. Abe explains the entrapment of his people under the capitalist Glukkon. Abe reflects on the delicious snacks Rupture Farms have created, before stumbling upon a secret that would turn his world upside-down forever – that the Glukkon intend to make Mudokons into a new line of savoury treat… The industrial and modern-gothic themes enacted by the striking intro to the *Oddworld* series set up the themes for what would become one of the PlayStation's most iconic (and hard as nails) series.

CRAB
CAKES
MEAT
NO LONGER
AVAILABLE

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO... CASTLEVANIA

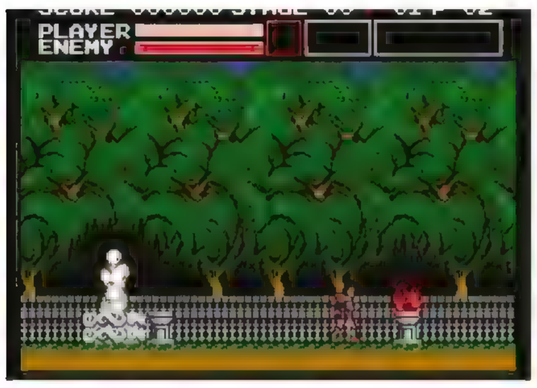
With *Castlevania* now in its thirties, we take a look back over its blood-soaked heritage

KONAMI'S *CASTLEVANIA* SERIES has undergone something of a resurgence in popularity of late, thanks to MercurySteam's critically acclaimed and commercially successful *Lords Of Shadow* entries. However, videogame veterans will be aware that the bloody history of this vampire-slaying franchise stretches back over 30 years, right the way back to Nintendo's 8-bit hardware. Since the original *Castlevania* – known as *Akumajo Dracula* in its native Japan, which translates as *Devil's Castle Dracula* – hit the Nintendo Famicom Disk System in 1986, we've seen instalments on a whole host of popular platforms, including the Mega Drive, N64, PlayStation and – more recently – the iPhone. The Belmont clan's eternal war against The Prince of Darkness has featured its fair share of twists and turns over the years, with some instalments becoming genre classics while others fall painfully short of the expected quality. Despite this, *Castlevania* boasts one of the most packed lineages in videogaming history, and its penchant for moody settings, whip-cracking action and brilliant music has secured it a legion of devoted fans. Over the next few pages we'll chart the sometimes tumultuous past of Konami's gothic masterpiece, covering all of the games released so far.



CASTLEVANIA
1986

The first entry in the series was originally an exclusive release for the Japan-only Famicom Disk System, but it was released on the NES in 1987. Focusing on the heroic Simon Belmont and his quest to destroy Dracula, the game followed a linear route through six different levels. It would later be ported to the Amiga, C64 and PC, with a Game Boy Advance release in 2004.



VAMPIRE KILLER
1986

Despite sharing gameplay, visuals and music with the NES original, the MSX2-only *Vampire Killer* – which was released in Japan, Europe and Brazil, but not the US – actually turned out to be a very different proposition. It was non-linear, featured RPG-like elements and had special items to collect.

HAUNTED CASTLE
1988

Most games series from the '80s usually appeared in arcades before moving to consoles, but *Castlevania* has never been one to follow convention. *Haunted Castle* took the core gameplay of the original and dramatically improved the visuals and sound, but sadly the end result wasn't as spectacular as it could have been. A Japan-only PS2 conversion appeared in 2006.

CASTLEVANIA II: SIMON'S QUEST
1987

Following the lead of the RPG-like MSX2 *Vampire Killer*, Simon's Quest boasted an open-ended game world which was subject to a day and night cycle. Enemies were more powerful when the sun set, which gave combat an additional challenge. Like its direct predecessor, *Simon's Quest* made its debut on the Famicom Disk System before being ported to the NES in 1988.

CASTLEVANIA III: DRACULA'S CURSE 1989

The third NES game is a real gem, mixing together multiple level paths, different playable characters and some of the best music on Nintendo's seminal 8-bit system. It was also notable for being the first game to showcase Alucard, Dracula's famous offspring.

CASTLEVANIA II: BELMONT'S REVENGE 1991

After *Castlevania: The Adventure, Belmont's Revenge* was a complete surprise. Considered by many fans to be one of the finest of the "old school" *Castlevania* titles, it pushed the host hardware to the limit. The soundtrack was especially good, with some truly amazing tunes courtesy of Hidehiro Funauchi.

SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV 1991

Essentially a remake of the NES original, *Castlevania*'s 16-bit debut was rightly regarded as one of the Super NES's better titles. Eminently playable and dripping with atmosphere, the CD-quality soundtrack was a thing of beauty.

AKUMAJO DRACULA 1993

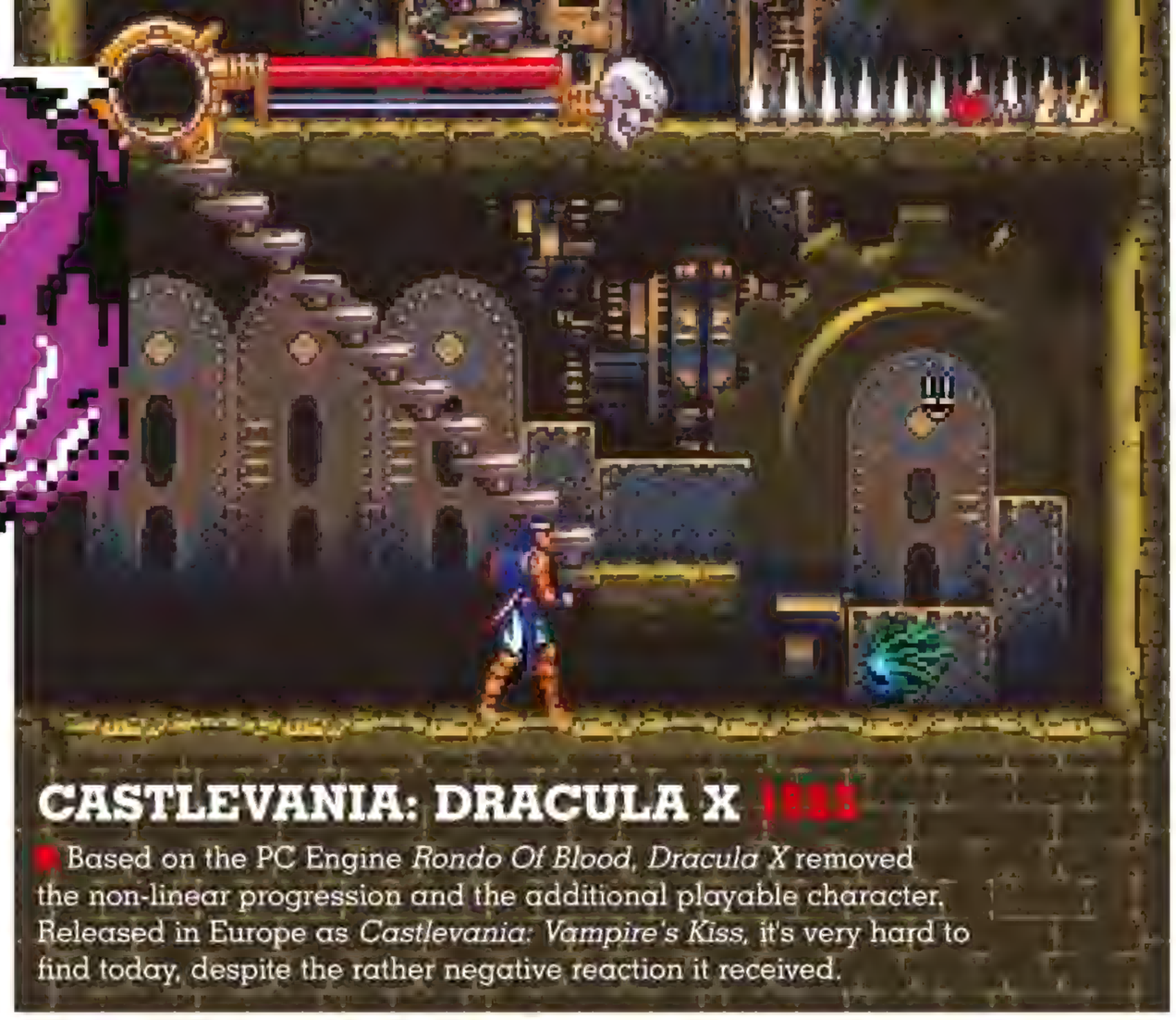
An exclusive for the Japan-only Sharp X68000 home computer, this was another remake of the original NES game. A PlayStation port – entitled *Castlevania Chronicles* – launched in 2001.

DRACULA X: RONDO OF BLOOD 1993

One of the best titles for NEC's PC Engine CD-ROM system, *Rondo Of Blood* combined anime-style cutscenes with a branching level design to great effect. It remained a Japanese exclusive until it was included as a bonus in the PSP remake in 2007. A Wii Virtual Console release followed in 2010.

CASTLEVANIA: THE NEW GENERATION / BLOODLINES 1994

Castlevania's first Sega outing was very special indeed. Set after the events of World War I, the game allowed you to control one of two heroes: John Morris (son of Quincy from Bram Stoker's original *Dracula* novel) and Eric Lecarde. Level designs were inventive, taking the player to landmarks such as Atlantis, The Leaning Tower of Pisa and a German munitions factory.



CASTLEVANIA: DRACULA X 1995

Based on the PC Engine *Rondo Of Blood*, *Dracula X* removed the non-linear progression and the additional playable character. Released in Europe as *Castlevania: Vampire's Kiss*, it's very hard to find today, despite the rather negative reaction it received.

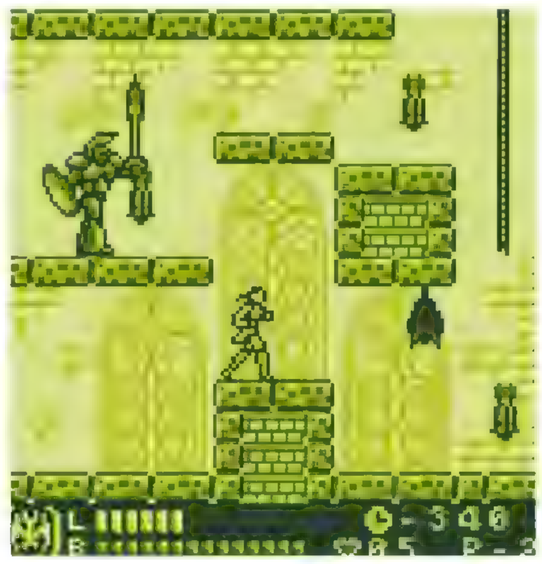
CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT 1997

The game which gave rise to the term "Metroidvania", *Symphony Of The Night* took the core *Castlevania* gameplay and added in a huge, gear-gated castle, as well as RPG elements such as experience points and different weapons, armour and items to collect. Another twist was the fact that the lead character was Dracula's troubled son Alucard.

"SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT TOOK THE CORE CASTLEVANIA GAMEPLAY AND ADDED IN A GEAR-GATED CASTLE"

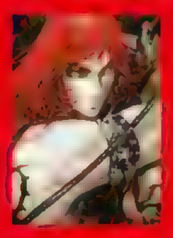
CASTLEVANIA: LEGENDS 1997

Notable for being the first game in the lineage to boast a female lead character, *Legends* sadly had little else going for it aside from its drive to promote gender equality. The level designs were poor, the action boring and the visuals worse than those seen in *Belmont's Revenge*. It's worth a pretty penny these days, but ignore unless you're a hardcore collector.



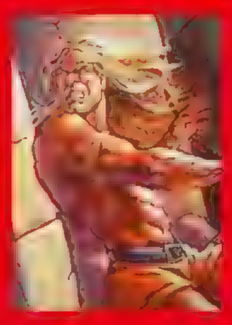
THE BELMONT CLAN

SIMON BELMONT



Arguably the franchise's most famous protagonist Simon has starred in several outings, including the first two NES games, *Castlevania Judgement* and *Lords Of Shadow: Mirror Of Fate*.

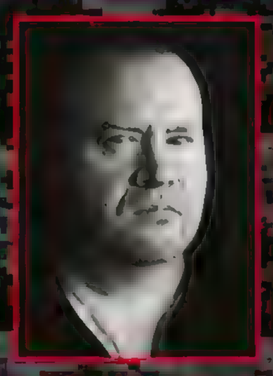
CHRISTOPHE BELMONT



The hero of the first two Game Boy titles, Christopher has to rescue his son Soleil in *Belmont's Revenge*.

TREVOR BELMONT

An ancestor of Simon Belmont, Trevor makes his debut in *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse*. He also makes appearances in *Castlevania: Curse Of Darkness* and *Lords Of Shadow: Mirror Of Fate*.



BEHIND THE SCENES:
INTERVIEW: DAVE COX
Castlevania series producer, Konami

What made you a fan of the series?
The original 8-bit game was one of the first console games I ever bought. It really stood out on the shelf as it had silver packaging when most other games were black. I really liked the art on the cover and once I got it home, I was hooked. I bought each *Castlevania* game as it was released, but it was *Super Castlevania IV* that really made me realise I wanted to make games and I wanted to work in the industry specifically for Konami. It would be a few years later, but my dream eventually came true.

Which instalment is your personal favourite, and why?
Super Castlevania IV is my favourite. The atmosphere, variety of enemies and the music that was so dark and moody. I loved that game and in fact I still do, to me it's the best game in the series.

Few videogame franchises are able to remain relevant across several consecutive hardware generations. Why do you think *Castlevania* has been able to do this?
I think because it has managed to evolve over time and appeal to new audiences. The original games are very different from the N64 games and the Metroidvanias are very different from the classics. We've had a fighting game and more RPG elements and now we have a hack and slash style game. Game series usually get tired after two or three iterations, but *Castlevania* has managed to avoid that with interesting new ideas and angles on the core themes of the series that have allowed it to remain fresh.

[illegible] has a reputation for amazing music; which soundtrack is the best, in your opinion?
Super Castlevania IV because it evokes a deep dark atmosphere and feels epic at the same time. I also like the soundtrack to *Symphony Of The Night*, especially the orchestral stuff.

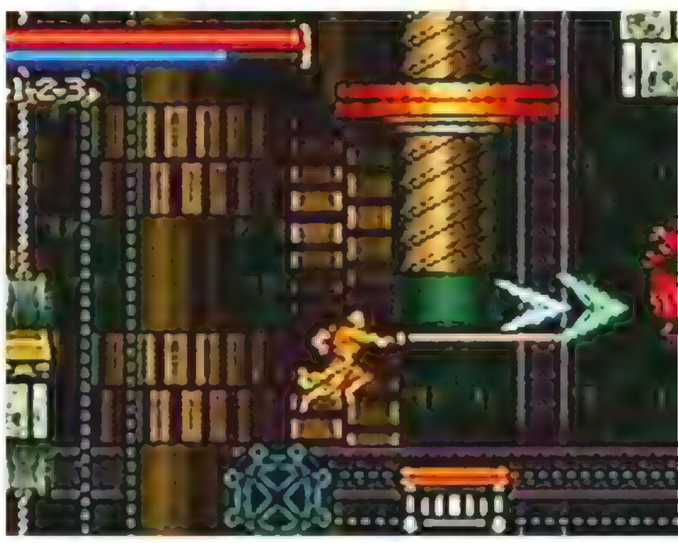
As a fan, what has it been like to influence the direction of *Castlevania* and bring it to a new, wider audience?
Enjoyable, nerve-wracking, stressful and rewarding. There are a lot of pressures mostly from yourself to deliver something that will be memorable and hopefully stand the test of time. Throughout the development process we always felt we were making game history and we felt it and tried to honour the heritage of those who went before us.

Where would you like the series to go from here?
Honestly I don't have a strong opinion, I see this as a torch being passed down and it's our turn to pass the torch on. I am looking forward to seeing what a new team can bring to the mythology and universe of *Castlevania*.

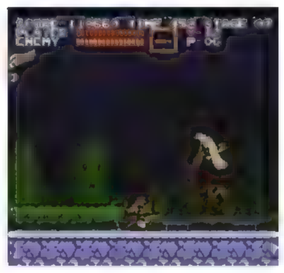
CASTLEVANIA 64 1999
Castlevana's first step into the realm of 3D divided critics and fans alike, but was moderately successful in transporting the vampire-killing action to a new dimension. However, following *Symphony Of The Night* was a tough move, and time hasn't been kind to the rather crude visuals.

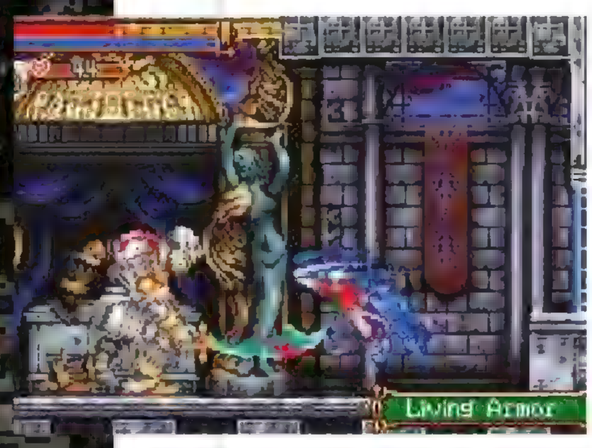
CASTLEVANIA: LEGACY OF DARKNESS 1999
The original N64 *Castlevania* was supposed to feature the wolfman Cornell, but he was removed at the last minute and instead stars in this sequel. Like its forerunner, *Legacy Of Darkness* wasn't perfect by any means, but had just about enough of the old *Castlevania* magic to make it worth a look.

CASTLEVANIA: CIRCLE OF THE MOON 2001
The first of three Game Boy Advance "Metroidvania" outings, *Circle Of The Moon* was a launch day game for Nintendo's handheld. Tiny sprites and very basic RPG elements made this a weak facsimile of *Symphony Of The Night*, but the next two games would improve on the formula.

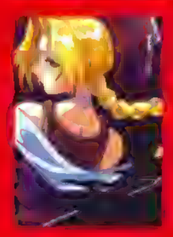


CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES 2001
Chronicles was essentially the Sharp X68000 *Akumajo Dracula* with a fresh lick of paint. It contained the original game and a new version with fresh character designs from Ayami Kojima, who also supplied the character artwork for *Symphony Of The Night*.





CASTLEVANIA: HARMONY OF DISSONANCE 2002
The second Game Boy Advance "Metroidvania", *Harmony Of Dissonance* contained improved visuals but noticeably worse music. The level design was also a little bland, but the inclusion of a dash move made it feel fast-paced and exciting.

SONIA BELMONT

Sonia starred in the disappointing *Castlevania Legends*. The game's story alludes to the fact that Alucard and Sonia had a child – which seems to indicate that the Belmont line contains vampire blood.

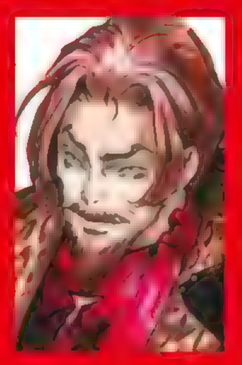
RICHTER BELMONT

Star of *Rondo Of Blood*, Richter would also feature in *Symphony Of The Night* and *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles*.

JUSTE BELMONT

Simon's grandson and the hero of *Harmony Of Dissonance*, Juste is especially adept at spellcasting thanks to his Belnades lineage.

JULIUS BELMONT
Chronologically, it's Julius who is the most recent Belmont, having soundly defeated Dracula in 1999, prior to the events of *Aria Of Sorrow*.



CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW 2003

The third and final instalment of *Castlevania* on the Game Boy Advance, *Aria Of Sorrow* was seen by some as one of the best games in the series to date, despite an underwhelming commercial performance in Japan.

CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE 2003

Undeterred by the lukewarm critical reception afforded to the N64 instalments, Konami soldiered on into the 3D arena with *Lament Of Innocence*, a PS2 action adventure that once again tried to pull *Castlevania* free of its 2D heritage. The *Devil May Cry*-style action was thrilling, but the repetitive gameplay let it down.

CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF DARKNESS 2005

Lament Of Innocence was followed by this PS2 and Xbox sequel, but despite a move towards a more open-ended game world – like the one seen in *Symphony Of The Night* – the same mistakes were sadly committed. For large portions of *Curse Of Darkness* you were simply battling the same enemies down identical corridors. An attempt to tie in the action with the events of *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* livened things up a little, but not much.

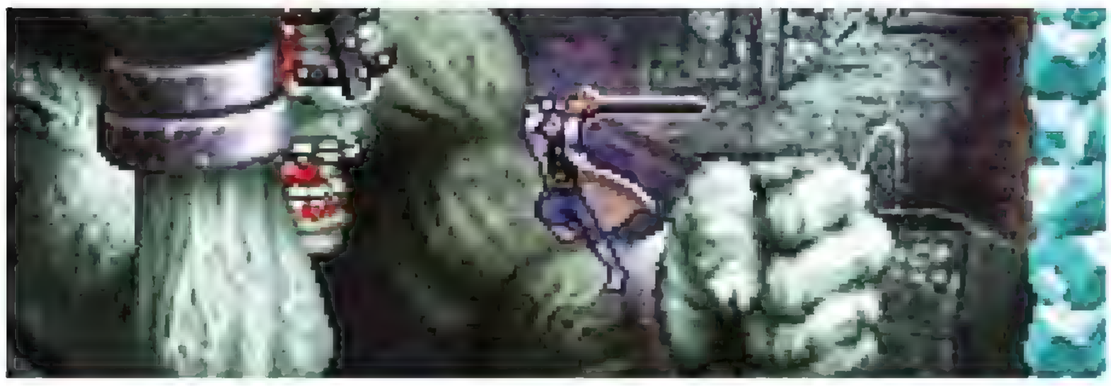
"DESPITE A MOVE TOWARDS A MORE OPEN-ENDED WORLD, THE SAME MISTAKES WERE COMMITTED"

CASTLEVANIA: DAWN OF SORROW 2005

The first of three outings on the Nintendo DS, *Dawn Of Sorrow* was a direct sequel to the Game Boy Advance *Aria Of Sorrow*, and shared many of the same cast members. Aside from some rather gimmicky touch-screen spell drawing, it was a solid release that benefited from a soul-stealing power system, offering plenty of replay value.

CASTLEVANIA: PORTRAIT OF RUIN 2006

The second DS game took place after *Castlevania: Bloodlines*, and stars John Morris's son as the hero. Levels took place inside paintings, allowing the developers to be a bit more creative with the locations. While it didn't really do all that much new, *Portrait Of Ruin* proved just how enduring the Metroidvania format could be.

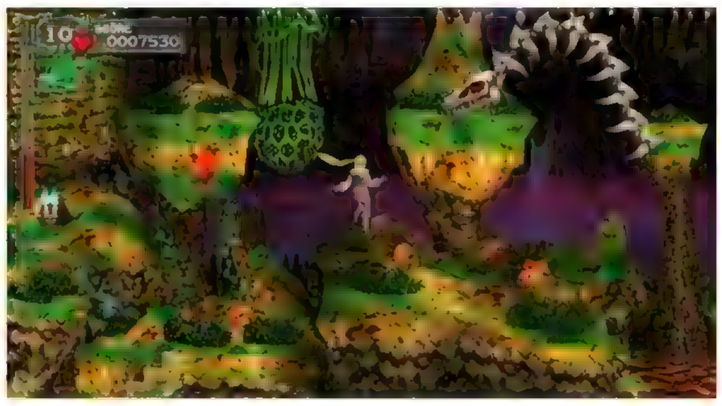


CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF SHADOWS 2007

Before iOS and Android turned up, mobile phone players were subjected to some pretty dire titles, and *Order Of Shadows* was one of them. Clunky controls, a narrow screen, terrible music and irksome action made this a *Castlevania* entry to forget. Thankfully, few know it even existed.

CASTLEVANIA: THE DRACULA X CHRONICLES 2007

A 2.5D remake of *Rondo Of Blood*, *Dracula X Chronicles* also included the PC Engine version as well as *Symphony Of The Night*, both in emulated form. The remake itself was merely OK – the new visuals actually look worse than those of the 8-bit original – but having all three games in a single package made this an appealing purchase.



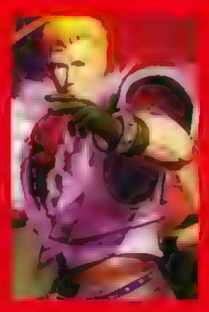
JOHN MORRIS

Distant relation to the Belmonts and the son of Quincy Morris – a character from the original Bram Stoker novel – John fights against the resurrection of Dracula at the hands of the evil Elizabeth Bartley.

JONATHAN MORRIS

John Morris's son and one of the two heroes of *Portrait Of Ruin*. Rising to fame in 1944, he's one of the most recent vampire killers of the Belmont bloodline.

REINHARDT SCHNEIDER



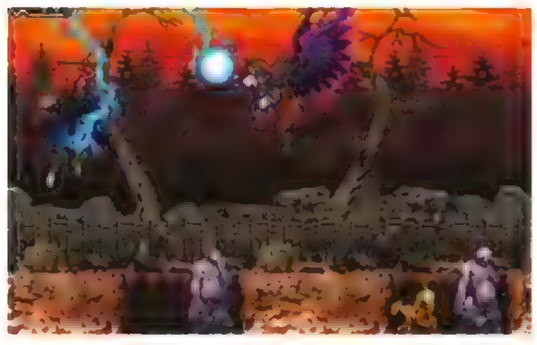
This character from *Castlevania 64* was originally known as Schneider Belmont. Despite this, he's very much a Belmont and wields the whip as good as any of his ancestors.

LEON BELMONT

Born in the 11th century, Leon is technically the first Belmont to take up the fight against Dracula. He is the lead of the PS2 title *Castlevania: Lament Of Innocence*.

CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF ECCLESIA 2008

The final instalment on the DS is unique in offering the first female lead since *Castlevania Legends*, but some commented at the time of release that the Metroidvania format was growing rather stale.



CASTLEVANIA: THE ARCADE 2009

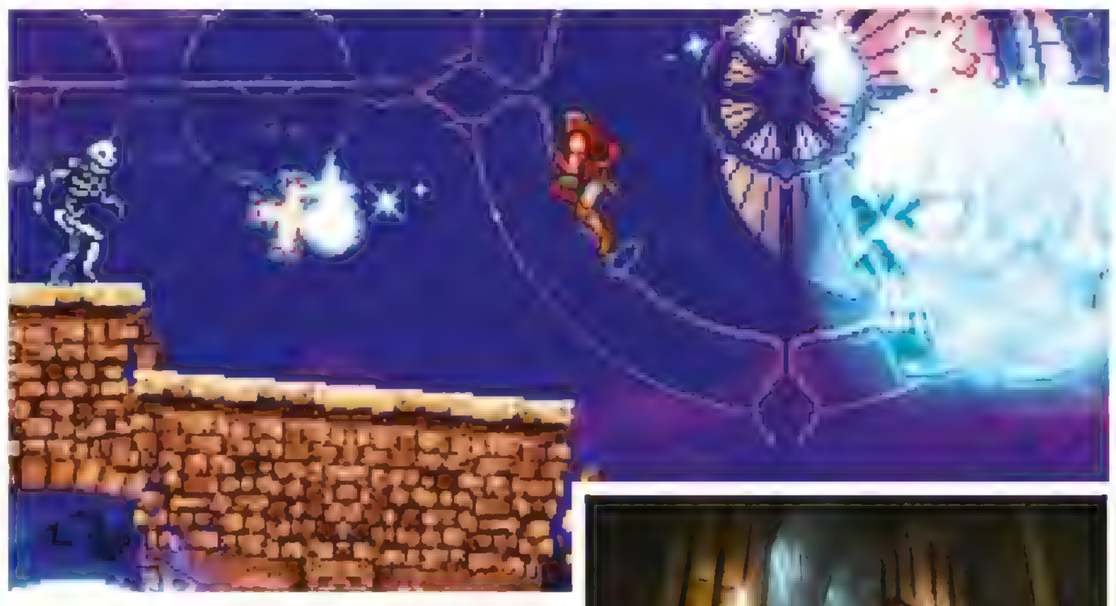
Castlevania's return to amusement arcades was something of a departure for the franchise. Instead of being an action platformer, it took the form of a light gun game in the same vein as *Time Crisis* and *Virtua Cop*, but with whipping replacing blasting. The game remains an arcade exclusive.

CASTLEVANIA JUDGMENT 2008

This ill-advised attempt to turn *Castlevania* into a 3D, arena-based brawler was as bad as it sounds on paper. Characters are pulled from several games thanks to a hokey time travel plot line, and the anime-style visuals – created by Death Note manga artist Takeshi Obata – felt hopelessly at odds with the *Castlevania* series.

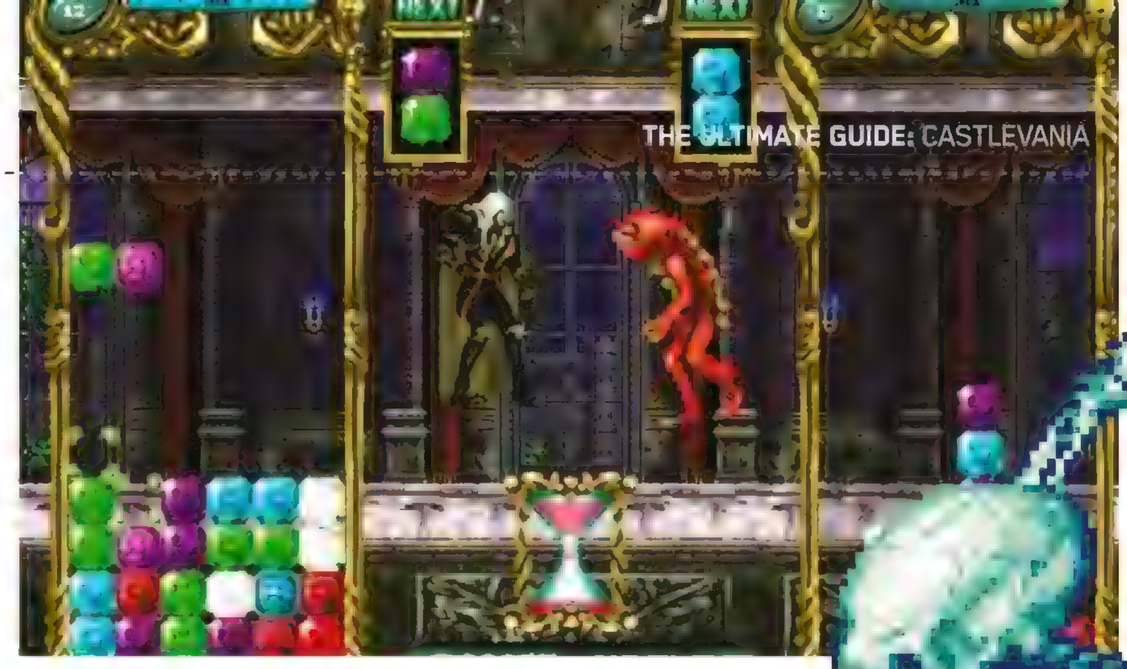
CASTLEVANIA: THE ADVENTURE REBIRTH 2009

Alongside *Gradius and Contra*, *Castlevania* was given the "Rebirth" treatment on Nintendo's WiiWare download service. Despite the title, this had little to do with the Game Boy original, and was instead a very impressive old-school outing complete with fine 2D visuals, a soundtrack packed with famous tunes and a beastly level of challenge. Worth every penny, then.



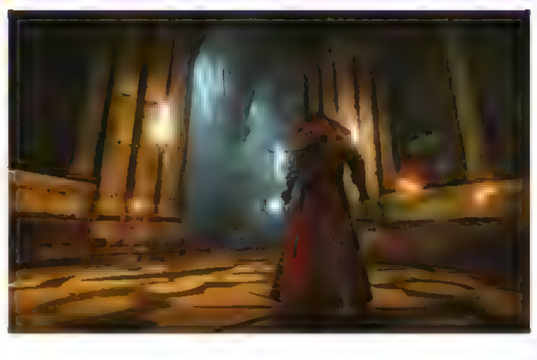
CASTLEVANIA: HARMONY OF DESPAIR 2010

Xbox Live Arcade title *Harmony Of Despair* is indicative of just how confused and rudderless the *Castlevania* series was prior to the *Lords Of Shadow* reboot. Part online multiplayer title, part traditional Metroidvania, the result was a confused mess which turned out to be neither fun to play nor particularly impressive.



CASTLEVANIA PUZZLE: ENCORE OF THE NIGHT 2010

Those hoping for a true sequel to *Symphony Of The Night* were disappointed to discover that this iOS outing was little more than a derivative puzzle game with assets stripped from the original 1997 classic. Fun for a while, but the *Castlevania* name felt entirely tacked-on.



CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW 2014

Released to mixed reviews, *Lords Of Shadow 2* places you in the role of Dracula as he navigates a Gothic, modern-day city in an effort to reclaim his former powers.

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW 2010

With sales dwindling and fans becoming increasingly restless for a return to form, Konami took a massive gamble with this 360 and PS3 offering. Spanish developer MercurySteam was brought on board, and even Hideo Kojima was involved at one point. The final product was exactly what the series needed; packed with *God Of War*-style action and some stunning visuals, *Lords Of Shadow* annoyed purists but delighted practically everybody else. It's the most commercially successful *Castlevania* game to date, which speaks volumes.

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW – MIRROR OF FATE 2013

MercurySteam's 3DS sequel is set in the middle of the *Lords Of Shadow* trilogy and pays fan service by including Simon Belmont, Trevor Belmont and Alucard – albeit in a drastically re-imaging storyline which pays little attention to series canon. The 2.5D platforming action was combined with methodical combat, making for a game which was unique, even when placed alongside other 2D entries.

GABRIEL BELMONT

The hero of *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow*. Gabriel is voiced by Scottish actor Robert Carlyle and is deeply troubled by the death of his beloved.

DESMOND BELMONT

The central character of the mobile title *Castlevania: Order Of Shadows*. Desmond is notable predominantly for his spiky haircut.

WHY I ♥...

Nights Into Dreams

LEANNE BAYLEY, CREATIVE PRODUCER, REMODE STUDIOS

I'm often asked what my favourite game of all time is, and without hesitation I always answer, Nights Into Dreams, *for the Sega Saturn.* Nights *is the first game I fell in love with. The world was the most vibrant and fantastical place I had ever visited, its inhabitants unique, the music echoed the feelings of each environment and the fluidity of movement was something new. Everything melted together so perfectly and was such a mesmerising experience.*

Although it wasn't the free-roaming 3D game we take for granted today, at the time the illusion of freedom was so compelling. The dream of free flight is such a universal desire and Nights *gave us this. It was acrobatic, graceful and you were in total control of it. Above all what I love about this game is that it is pure fun.*

48 888 ...LAE

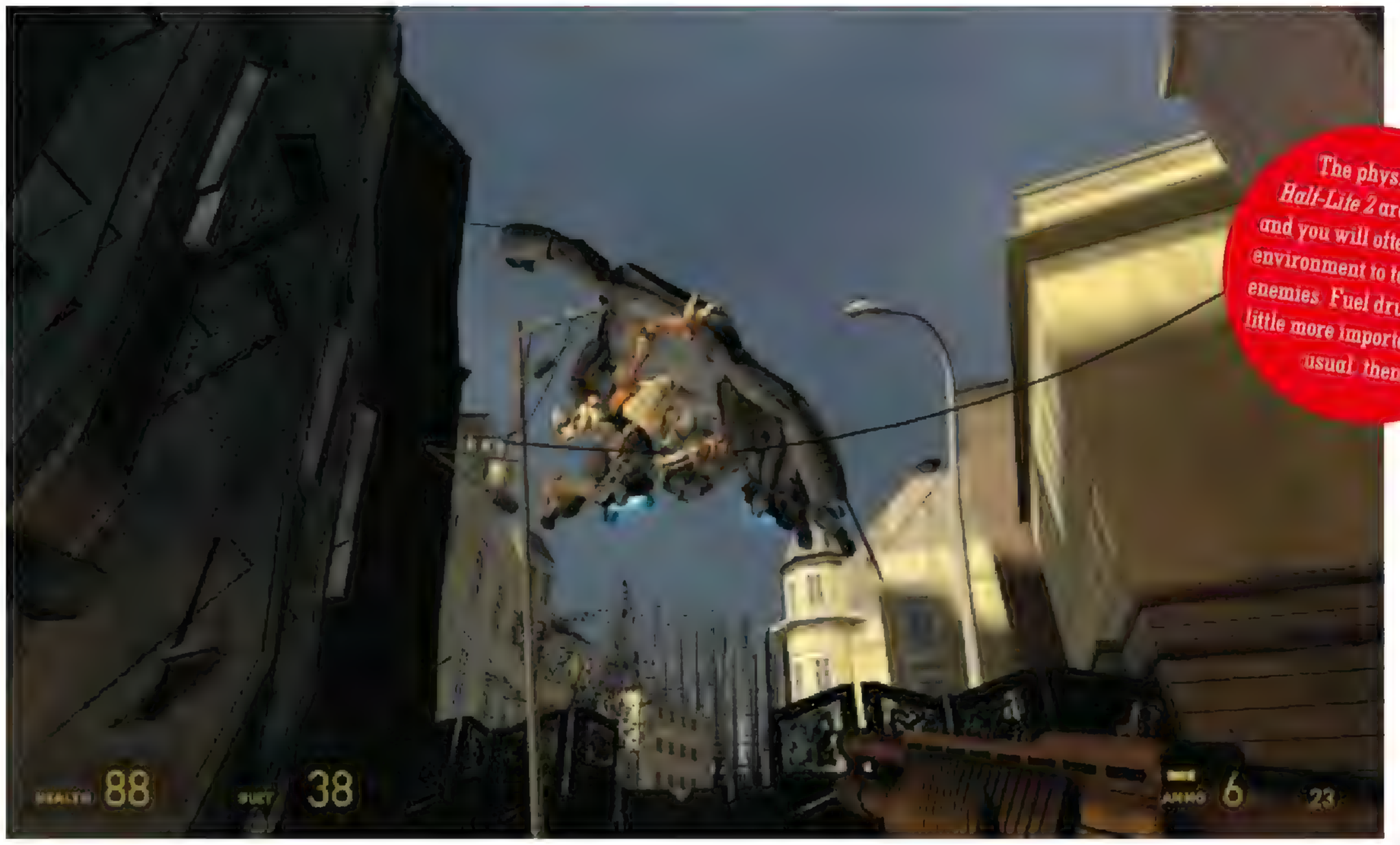
"Although it wasn't the free-roaming 3D game we take for granted today, at the time the illusion of freedom was so compelling"

LEANNE BAYLEY, REMODE STUDIOS

GAME CHANGERS

HALF-LIFE 2

Released: 2004 Publisher: Valve System: PC



Join us as we look back at one of the most influential videogames of all time and one that helped shape the future of first-person shooters – Valve's revolutionary sequel to Half-Life

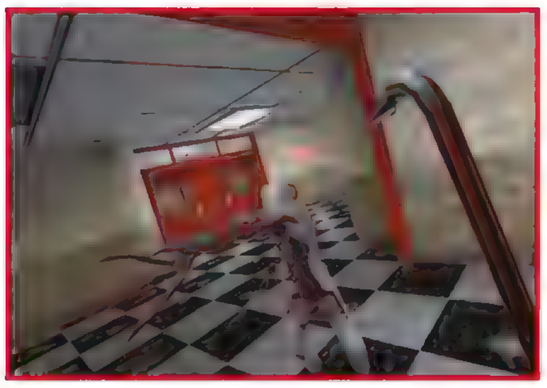
WHEN VALVE ANNOUNCED a sequel to its hit shooter *Half-Life* at E3 in May 2003, the gaming world predictably went nuts. In addition to impressing with an amazing new game engine called Source, Valve was revealing a sequel to one of the most important first-person shooters of all time. Expectations seemed to be impossibly high, but once Valve's magnum opus was released some 18 months later, it not only met the lofty hopes of gamers everywhere, but smashed them with yet another landmark videogame.

Valve had once again set a new standard for the popular genre, a standard which is still being felt in today's games. *BioShock Infinite*, *Homefront*, *Resistance 3* and *Dishonored* are just a few of the titles to share DNA with Valve's impressive sequel, and developers continue to cite *Half-Life 2* and its own groundbreaking predecessor as essential when it comes to implementing narrative into games. This stylish storytelling technique is rampant in *Half-Life 2*, and has done so well that it's not even necessary to have played the original game. Subtle narration fills you in on all the key points of the original, so a player can be as disorientated as protagonist Gordon Freeman when he first makes his appearance and still know what's going on.

Some might say that Valve had it easy because it was essentially building on the groundwork it had lain down with the excellent *Half-Life*. That's not really fair, however. Valve isn't the sort of company to rest on its laurels, and it pushed every aspect of the original game to deliver a title that, nearly a decade on, still manages to enthral those who play it.

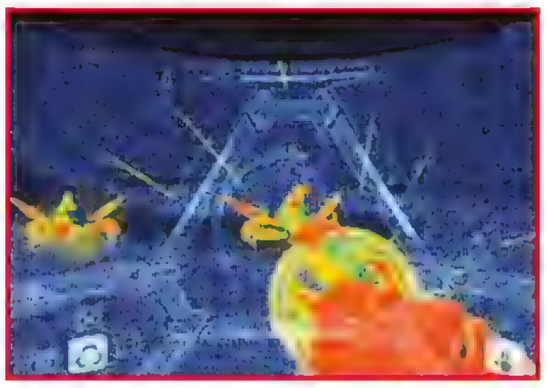
This in part is down to the Source engine itself, a highly polished piece of coding that's still heavily in use today. There's a cleanness and slickness to Valve's engine that is consistently impressive, regardless of how it has to scale. Valve even managed a perfectly solid port on the original Xbox, admittedly with lengthy loading times and an

HALF-LIFE 2: BEFORE AND AFTER | THE GAMES THAT SHARE DNA WITH VALVE'S HIT GAME



HALF-LIFE

★ Valve's industry-defining shoot-'em-up was a world away from the likes of *Doom* and *Quake*, providing gamers with more than just enemies to shoot at. It introduced many key game mechanics to the genre and proved you didn't need expansive cut-scenes to tell an incredibly polished story.



METROID PRIME

★ Although *Metroid Prime* has plenty of guns in it, like *Half-Life 2* it was anything but a conventional shooter. Its greatest achievement was converting the 2D essence of the *Metroid* series to the third dimension, but its beautifully detailed environments are what really link it to Valve's shooter.

F.E.A.R.

★ Like *Half-Life 2*, Monolith's *F.E.A.R.* proved that it was possible to make survival-based horror and wrap it around a first-person shooter. It takes the concept further than Valve did, but remembers that it's atmosphere and not just gory shocks that should drive a story forward.

BIOSHOCK INFINITE

★ *BioShock* builds on both *Half-Life 2* and the likes of *System Shock 2* by delivering believable characters and an achingly gorgeous world. It's arguably one of the greatest modern day examples of story narration, and features brilliant AI in the form of Elizabeth, the girl you have to rescue.

occasionally erratic frame rate. Revisit *Half-Life 2* today, and it remains a spectacularly good-looking game, and while its textures might not be as detailed as more recent games (there's over a decade's gulf in technology after all), it's surprising how good it still looks. It's most notable in the lighting (which was substantially improved in *Half-Life 2*'s two episodic sequels) and the many characters you meet, including Alyx; one of the most realistic and believable characters we've ever encountered in a videogame.

■■■ THE MOST STUNNING aspect of *Half-Life 2*, however, is how realistic everything felt. This in part was due to the dynamic lighting, but the environments were also stunning pieces of work that felt utterly believable as you explored them. There are no pointless dead ends in *Half-Life 2*, invisible walls are largely absent (Valve simply blocks off areas it doesn't want you to go with suitable objects) and every building you go into appears to have a distinct purpose. Every single inch of the game world, styled on a dystopian Eastern Europe, feels completely real as if it's a place from a long forgotten time that members of Valve has visited. It's alien but also recognisable, and you can't help but want to explore every bit of it. Exploring does highlight

HALF-LIFE 2 IS AS MUCH ABOUT THE ADVENTURE AS SHOOTING ENEMIES

KEY FACTS

■ *Half-Life 2* was built using Valve's Source Engine. The adaptable engine made its debut with *Counter-Strike: Source* and has been used in every Valve game since.

■ Alyx Vance is voiced by Merle Dandridge, a theatre performer in *Spamalot* and *Rent*. If her voice sounds familiar you've probably heard it in the excellent *The Last Of Us* as Marlene.

■ Valve was involved in a legal battle with Vivendi Universal over the distribution rights of *Half-Life 2* in cyber cafes. A settlement was agreed with Vivendi losing the right to distribute Valve's games.

the fact that *Half-Life 2* is actually very linear, but as with the best games, it cleverly tricks you into thinking the opposite, and that you're instead inside an epic believable world and not just traipsing down predetermined corridors.

This bait and switch continues with the excellent gameplay, which continues to play with conventions. On the surface it appears to be a straightforward first-person shooter, but in reality it's so much more. Like its predecessor, *Half-Life 2* is as much about the adventure as it is about shooting down enemies, and while it has a variety of satisfying weaponry (most notably the game-changing Gravity Gun), they should be seen more as tools designed to deal with each new challenge that Valve throws at you. Most enemies can be dealt with in a number of different ways, and you'll often find yourself experimenting and discovering new methods of dealing with past locations you've visited before.

Puzzles are also rife in *Half-Life 2*, and really come to the fore once you've acquired the aforementioned Gravity Gun. They're not as elaborate as those promised in the E3 video, but you'll still find yourself scratching your head. You'll also marvel at just how much variety can be found, especially when it starts straying into other genres (driving, survival horror, squad-based shooting) and pulls them off with little effort. *Half-Life 2* may have been a relatively rough ride for Valve during development (at one point the FBI was called in after parts of the source code were leaked), but you'd never tell from the final product. It's as finely crafted a videogame that you'll ever come across, and deserves every piece of acclaim it has received. When the G-Man states during the E3 reveal that "We've been rather busy in your absence, Mr Freeman," he certainly wasn't lying.

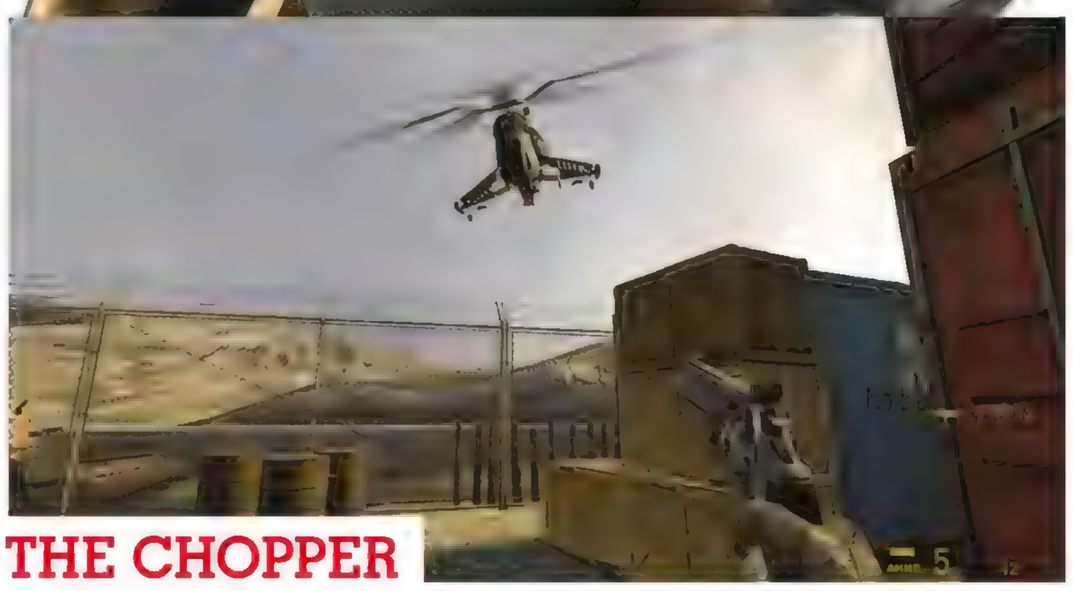
GAME CHANGERS

HALF-LIFE 2: DEFINING MOMENTS

VALVE'S SCI-FI SEQUEL REMAINS AN ASTONISHING GAME OVER A DECADE AFTER ITS RELEASE. WE REVEAL THE MOMENTS THAT WILL STAY WITH YOU FOREVER

ALYX

BIOSHOCK INFINITE'S ELIZABETH may have created a new benchmark for AI in videogames, but Alyx beat her to the punch by a good nine years. Cleverly scripted and surprisingly realistic, you genuinely miss the moments when she's not around, and the adventure always picks up when she's there. The touching moments she has with Dog and father are genuinely charming, while her intelligence and well-animated expressions set her a world apart from the portrayal of women in other videogames.



THE CHOPPER

EARLY ON IN *Half-Life 2* you're attacked by a persistent Hunter-Chopper. It follows you across several stages, causing you to scramble to safety whenever you're in an open space, or simply go underground to avoid it. Valve occasionally allows you to have a breather, but it always brings the huge gunship back at the most inopportune moments. It's not until you gain access to a gun-mounted hovercraft that you finally have the means to take the damned thing down, making its final demise that much sweeter.

RAVENHOLM

EVERY ASPECT OF Ravenholm is superb, with Valve distilling the entire survival horror genre into two of the tightest gaming hours you'll ever experience. Highlights include using buzz saws to decapitate zombies or crushing them with elaborate traps. Its highlight, however, is arguably your last final desperate race across the city's roofs and its ominous graveyard. Fast zombies surround you from all sides, with only the rattling of nearby drainpipes giving you any indication of where they will attack next.

REALISTIC WORLD

ONE OF THE greatest aspects of *Half-Life 2* is just how real everything feels. Characters appear to be going about their daily lives, helping to further paint the grim world that Valve has created, while conveniently filling you in with important information. You'll often discover neat little scenarios like friends holding each other or treating the wounded that you'd otherwise miss, as it's all subtly taking place in the background. It's amazingly effective, and adds a further layer of believability to the world.

THE BRIDGE

ONE OF *HALF-LIFE 2*'S tensest moments comes when you need to cross a derelict bridge. The sense of vertigo as you scramble along the loose struts is immense, and you'll need a good eye in order to find the best way across the maze of metal. Halfway across you get attacked, putting you in a frantic gunfight with nowhere to hide and an immense drop beneath you. Things get even harder once you've reached your destination, as you have to make your way back with a Combine Gunship hot on your tail.

THE GRAVITY GUN

QUITE POSSIBLY ONE of the finest weapons in videogaming, it's rather telling that the only thing that's impressed us since is Valve's own Portal Gun. You pick this up early in your adventure, and it changes your approach to the rest of the game dramatically. Levels suddenly become puzzles, as the gun lets you manipulate objects and work out inventive ways of clearing obstacles. It's even better during the final stage as, infused with Dark Energy, you pick up enemy soldiers and throw them about like rag dolls.

HELPING THE REBELS

AS YOU'RE TRAVELLING along Highway 17 you encounter a small pocket of resistance fighters expecting incoming forces. Upon gaining access to a rocket launcher you're attacked by gunships and bedlam erupts. It's the first real showcase of not only the enemy AI, but your rebel compatriots. As you do your best to take down the gunship, your AI helpers will point out when your weapon needs reloading and even hand over ammo. It's an excellent sequence that adds further realism to the game world.

HIGHER GROUND

AS YOU APPROACH Highway 17's beach you encounter deadly Antlions that are kept at bay by machines that send vibrations through the earth. The safety of those machines is soon left behind though, and you're forced to negotiate treacherous terrain where dropping to the floor immediately causes the Antlions to attack. The tension soon racks up as you make your way across rocks and broken debris, using your gravity gun to clear large stretches of ground. It's easily one of the tensest moments in the game.

TURNING THE TABLES

AS *HALF-LIFE 2*'S ending draws near, you're required to assault a heavily armed prison. Enemies are everywhere, and the whole level seems to be a suicide mission. It's fortunate, then, that you've access to a new weapon that allows you to control the Antlions. After being punished by the insectoid foes in the previous levels it's gratifying to set them loose against your enemies. Similar squad tactics are used later on with rebels, but they don't feel quite as effective as they do in your first encounter.

STRIDER ATTACK

STRIDERS ARE HUGE tripod robots that require immense firepower to take down. Without a rocket launcher you're usually outmatched, so you'll often have to hide from them. While there are several battles where you get to take them down, by far the best moment to feature the metallic monstrosities is when you find yourself in an underground tunnel having to give one the slip. As you make your way forwards you hear a crashing from behind, only to realise that the beast has broken through the ceiling.

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO...
BLIZZARD

With World Of Warcraft now over ten years old, we decided it was the perfect time to look back at Blizzard's impressive back catalogue

NOWADAYS IT'S HARD to imagine PC gaming without thinking of Blizzard. It's responsible for three of the most important franchises on the platform – *World Of Warcraft*, *Diablo* and *Starcraft* – and has had phenomenal success with its *WoW* spinoff *Hearthstone*.

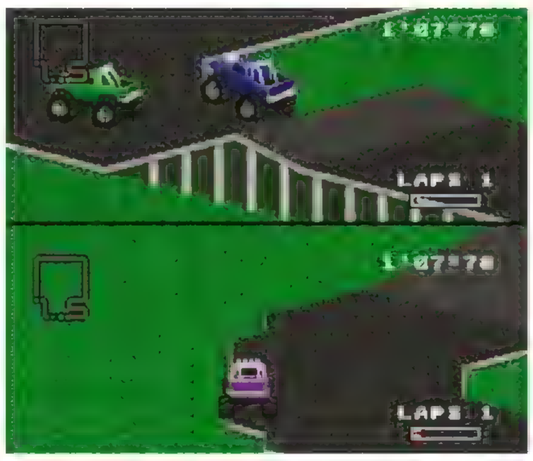
Once upon a time though, things were very different for the fledgling developer. Originally formed in 1991 by Frank Pearce, Allen Adham and Michael Morhaime, Blizzard was originally known as Silicon & Synapse and started off creating Amiga, PC and Mac ports for a range of games, including *Battle Chess* and *Castles*. That all changed with the release of *RPM Racing*, its first standalone game for the Super Nintendo. Other console releases quickly followed, including *Rock n' Roll Racing*, *The Lost Vikings* and *The Death And Return Of Superman*, but it was the release of the real-time strategy hit *Warcraft: Orcs & Humans* that saw the Irvine-based developer turn its focus to the PC market. The move was a shrewd one, with Blizzard Entertainment now being one of the biggest players in the market thanks in no small part to its groundbreaking success with the likes of *Diablo III* and *World Of Warcraft*.

Join us as we celebrate this gaming giant and look at some of its key releases. How many have you played?

RPM RACING 1991

SYSTEM: SNES

Competent is the best way to describe Blizzard's first original entry in the world of videogames. It's essentially a remake of Electronic Arts' popular Commodore 64 game *Racing Destruction Set*, and allows you to race around your own courses, or compete in premade ones with a variety of different vehicles. While the racing itself is rather average, it's worth visiting as it's one of the first SNES games to utilise the console's distinctive High Resolution Graphics Mode. While the aesthetics give a good indication of the technical success that would mark many of Blizzard's later games, the uninspired gameplay and tiny playing window made *RPM Racing* needlessly difficult. Oh and that's an acronym for Radical Psycho Machine but you already knew that. Right?



THE LOST VIKINGS 1992

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Now this is more like it. *The Lost Vikings* is clunky and a little awkward to control at times, but also a great example of the imagination and creativity that would form the hallmark of many later Blizzard games. A bizarre mishmash that incorporates puzzling, platforming and strategy, *The Lost Vikings* sees you managing your time between the titular Nords: Erik, Baleog and Olaf. Each has his own unique abilities – Erik runs faster and can jump, Baleog utilises close and long range weapons, while Olaf can use his shield to block enemies and projectiles. The Vikings themselves are full of character, while its success on the SNES saw it moving to numerous other platforms, from the Amiga CD32, to the Game Boy Advance.

ROCK N' ROLL RACING 1993

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Blizzard learnt quickly from the mistakes of *RPM Racing*, delivering a better sequel that is immense fun to play. Out came the high-res visuals, more weapons were introduced, the plinky-plonky soundtrack was replaced with a selection of heavy rock riffs, while the handling and track design was greatly improved. The end result is an entertaining racer that offers convincing physics, fierce competition and a great sense of progression. It's the superb renditions of rock tunes that many will (rightly) remember *Rock n' Roll Racing* for.

BLACKTHORNE 1994

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Although *The Lost Vikings* hinted at Blizzard's interest in exploring game worlds, it was this effort that proved the developer was able to create interesting game worlds. *Blackthorne* is an epic, brooding adventure that calls to mind the likes of *Flashback* and *Prince Of Persia*. Protagonist Kyle is able in the platform stakes but packs a mean punch thanks to the meaty shotgun he carries. Gameplay is similar to the aforementioned *Flashback*, with shadows of the SNES port of *Alien 3*.

THE DEATH AND RETURN OF SUPERMAN 1994

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, SNES

Well this is an achievement. Against all odds, Blizzard made a Superman game that wasn't terrible. Based on the popular comic strip, *Death And Return* is worth playing because it allows you to control five different characters: Superman, The Cyborg, The Eradicator, Superboy and Steel.

They all feel fairly different to each other, but there's no denying that this is nothing more than a game about hitting things and hitting them hard. Now we're normally fine with this, but the combat of *Death And Return* is fairly run-of-the-mill and the lack of a multiplayer means that anyone other than a Superman fan will soon get bored. Still, being able to fly – albeit for limited periods – is a rather nice touch.

WARCRAFT: ORCS & HUMANS 1994

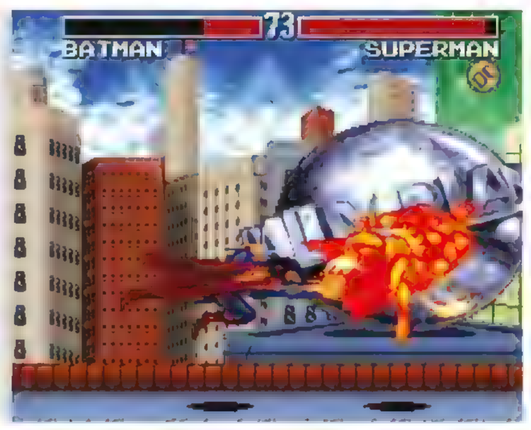
SYSTEM: DOS, MAC

Warcraft certainly wasn't the first RTS game, but it was one of the first to really realise the possibilities of the still fledgling genre and help take it in new and exciting directions. The most notable difference to its peers is the distinctive fantasy setting. The sci-fi elements found in the likes of *Command & Conquer* and *Dune 2* are entirely missing, instead focusing on an age-old battle between humans and orcs. It features similar resource management to its peers; the ability to group together small parties and has a surprisingly slick interface for its age. There's no denying that it feels rather clunky to play now, but the ability to host matches between Mac and DOS players, compete in different scenarios and use spawn installations felt incredibly fresh at the time. This was a genuinely excellent strategy game and in fact was the title that's largely responsible for making Blizzard the success it is today.

JUSTICE LEAGUE TASK FORCE 1995

SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE, SNES

There's a reason everyone forgot Blizzard's *Street Fighter II*-inspired one-on-one fighter. It's rubbish. Okay, rubbish might be a little harsh, but there's no denying this is a very forgettable brawler with few redeeming features. The sprites look decent but hitting your opponent rarely feels satisfying, while the difficulty is all over the shop. Kudos to Blizzard for making Aquaman as capable as every other hero here, but this is pretty dire stuff. In fact, we were right the first time. It's rubbish.



"WARCRAFT II BOASTS THE SAME BRILLIANT RESOURCE GATHERING AND CONTROLS THAT MADE THE ORIGINAL SO POPULAR TO PLAY"

WARCRAFT II: TIDES OF DARKNESS 1995

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Blizzard's sequel to its first strategy hit was another big success eventually shifting over 2 million units. That's a lot of Orc slaying. Like the original game, *Tides Of Darkness* consists of two separate single player campaigns, one for Orcs, the other for humans. It also boasts the same brilliant resource gathering and controls that made the original so popular to play. Simply replicating a past classic isn't enough for Blizzard though, so it introduced an insane amount of extras that further enhanced its fantastic original.

The landlocked gameplay of the original is expanded with the introduction of flying and seafaring craft; new races can be aligned with; it is possible to build a huge number of new structures, while the base resources of gold and lumber have been swollen with the introduction of oil. The Fog Of War mechanic has also been tweaked, making for a far better balanced game. In fact everything about *Tides Of Darkness* screams improvement, from its fantastic cartoony looking visuals to its slick and versatile interface. The console versions have new control systems and include the expansion *Beyond The Dark Portal*.

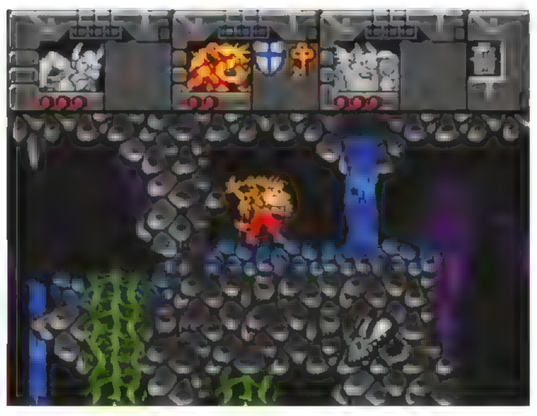
DIABLO 1996

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Diablo is another example of a Blizzard game that takes a well worn genre and turns it into something far more exciting.

At its most basic *Diablo* owes fealty to the likes of *Dandy* and *Gauntlet*, early dungeon crawlers that allowed you to descend into the underworld and duff up a seemingly endless supply of monsters, but it feels far more epic. This in part is due to the three fleshed out characters: Warrior, Rogue and Sorcerer that all play differently to each other and in turn offer plenty of replay value once the game has been completed. It's the story that really sets it apart from other games of the time, that and the sheer amount of loot you can pick up as you play.

While *Diablo* has a fresh take on the war between heaven and hell, it also allows you to find a huge selection of insanely powerful items. While you'll fear exploring the deeper sections of Tristram (the village where *Diablo* is set) the sheer power to be found there will spur you on – often to your inevitable doom. It clearly plays best with four players, but *Diablo* still works extremely well when playing solo.



THE LOST VIKINGS 2 1997

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Blizzard's sequel is a rather unsatisfying one. It was released five years after the original game and straddles generations (the Saturn, PlayStation and PC versions were handled by Beam Software).
The structure of *The Lost Vikings 2* is the same as the first game: use your Viking's unique skills to traverse the puzzle-like levels. Unfortunately, the addition of two new characters, Fang the wolf and Scorch the dragon, make the game feel a little messier. While you still only ever control three Vikings at a time, the new abilities – Fang can climb walls and Scorch can fly and throw fireballs – don't gel as well together and it feels like Blizzard's game is trying to do too much. It works far better on the 32-bit systems, due to a lack of competition on those platforms at the time, but age has not been kind to it.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVE BREVIK

Diablo's co-creator on how it came to be

What inspired *Diablo*?
There were many, many games that influenced *Diablo*'s design, but if I had to narrow it down to a handful, I would say that *Moria* – a Unix-based text game – and *Warcraft* were the biggest.

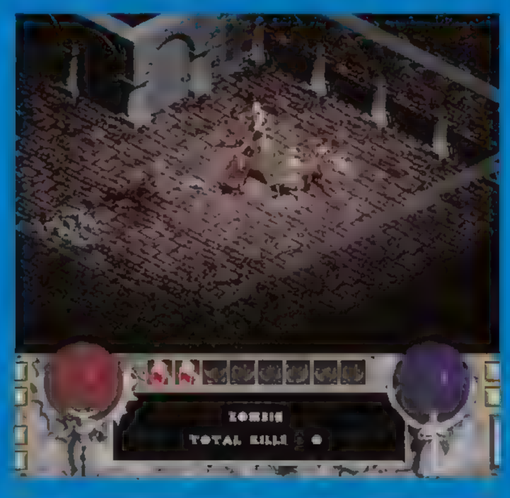
***Diablo* isn't like many traditional RPGs. Why is that?**
I was never a big fan of elves, unicorns and dragons. I thought that a zombie-infested game with demons was a far more attractive prospect than the Tolkien-esque stuff. We wanted a far grittier atmosphere to the game. I never really set out to make it strictly for a more mature audience, but we made it the way we found most interesting and different.

Why create an action RPG?
Because of the mechanics of *Diablo*'s real-time environment, we had to change how the numbers worked for this sort of game. *Diablo* had to be balanced in such a way that it was action packed and involving for players. With pen and paper RPGs, fights can take a very long time, because each round can last ten to fifteen minutes in a normal-sized group. As a result, the numbers are different. You don't want there to be 25 rounds, but you might want that out of a *Diablo* boss monster.

Is it true you wanted to make *Diablo* as accessible as possible?
We joked that *Diablo* needed to pass the 'mom test', so we asked ourselves: is it simple enough that my mom could play it, or will she not understand it? If it was too complicated then we either changed it so that it wasn't, or introduced it over time in a step-by-step fashion so that complex concepts were broken down over time. We made the game extremely easy to use and accessible to a wide range of gamers. This was done to widen the audience and make it more of a mass-market kind of game.

Why did you create random dungeons?
I love random content, because you never know what's going to happen. With planned-out levels, you can balance the game easier and create certain situations you want the player to go through. But once the player goes through that content once, it's far less interesting to go through it again.

Why did you implement the multiplayer mode?
Blizzard's president proposed Battle.net. This was clearly a good idea and we agreed to it even though it meant extra work. We had to go back into the code to retro-fit much of multiplayer into it.



STARCRAFT 1998

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

The beauty of Blizzard's hit RTS lies in the sheer diversity of its three races: the Protoss, Terrans and Zerg. Unlike many real-time strategy games of the time, each race has its own distinct abilities, making them stand apart from each other and lead to different styles of play. Despite these differences, the game itself is beautifully balanced, ensuring that no one faction has the upper hand. While the single player campaign mode is huge, consisting of 30 stages, it's the finely tuned multiplayer and level editor that helped Blizzard's game build a huge fanbase. The controls are great, with Blizzard taking everything it learned from *Warcraft* and creating a system that's fast and flexible.

DIABLO II 2000

SYSTEM: WINDOWS, MAC

Everything about Blizzard's sequel was bigger and better than the first. Graphically it was sensational, with dark gloomy locations that contrasted greatly with the limited environments of *Diablo*. The character roster has also been revisited with five new heroes: Amazon, Necromancer, Barbarian, Sorceress and Paladin. As with *Diablo*, each plays completely differently to each other, while their skill trees allow for an impressive amount of customisation.

WARCRAFT III: REIGN OF CHAOS 2002

SYSTEM: WINDOWS, MAC

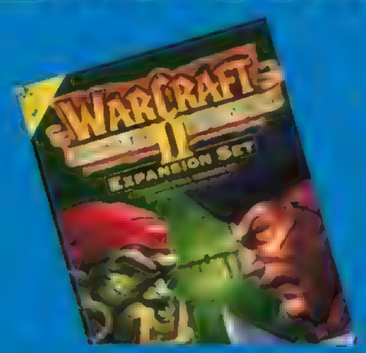
Another smash hit for Blizzard. The most obvious change is that there are two new races, Night Elves and Undead, with their own distinct skill sets. Creeps – hostile AI units that will attack anyone – are also a big addition to the game, adding an additional fear factor and making the mining of gold and other resources particularly dangerous. A day and night cycle has also been included, which changes the gameplay as creeps fall asleep at night, making scouting all the more effective. By far the biggest change is the introduction of heroes, powerful units that level up and unlock a range of useful skills and spells. Add in an expansive world editor and it becomes hard to see how Blizzard could possibly improve its classic in the future. In a similar vein, no new *Warcraft* games have been released since *The Frozen Throne* in 2003.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT 2004

SYSTEM: WINDOWS, MAC

We won't focus too much on Blizzard's game changer as it's pretty obvious to all why it's so important, but let's just say it changed MMORPGs forever. One of the most noticeable aspects of *WoW* was that it wasn't massively original. Instead it simply took many of the elements from other similar games and added a level of polish that immediately made it stand out from its peers. Talent trees, quest systems, immersive lore and a near bug free launch all helped Blizzard's game on release, while its general easiness and accessibility ensured it picked up a huge number of new players who typically didn't play MMORPGs.

EXPANDING OUT The key Blizzard expansions



BEYOND THE DARK PORTAL

FROM: WARCRAFT II
YEAR: 1996

The first expansion for a *Warcraft* game introduced two new campaigns, new multiplayer maps and 10 new heroes. Oh and it was developed by the defunct Cyberlore Studios.

HELLFIRE

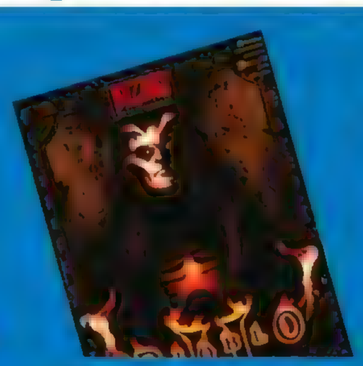
FROM: DIABLO
YEAR: 1997

Interestingly, this expansion wasn't by Blizzard, with coding duties falling to Synergistic Software. It introduces a new character, the Monk, as well as two hidden ones (Barbarian and Bard).

BROOD WAR

FROM: STARCRAFT
YEAR: 1998

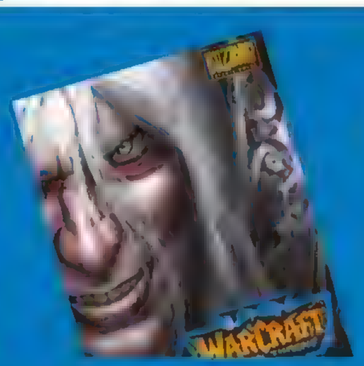
Starcraft's first expansion was a big one. It diminishes the success of rushing tactics, has a bigger focus on strategy and introduces seven new units and augmented AI when playing alone.



LORD OF DESTRUCTION

FROM: DIABLO II
YEAR: 2001

This is notable for the addition of its fifth act, two new classes: the Assassin and Druid and a raft of gameplay changes to the core game, including new items and weapons.



FROZEN THRONE

FROM: WARCRAFT III
YEAR: 2003

This expansion features four campaigns, new units for each available race and several neutral heroes. It also reintroduced some sea units last seen in *Warcraft II*.

BURNING CRUSADE

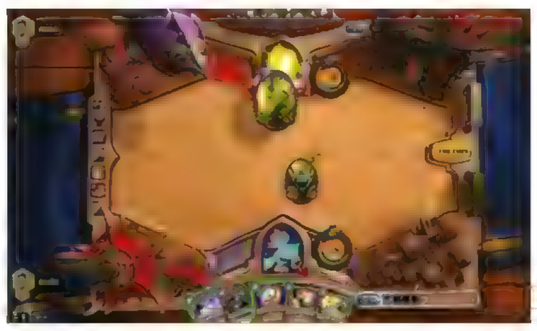
FROM: WOW
YEAR: 2007

Blizzard's first *WoW* expansion sold over 2 million units on release day. It adds the Draenei and Blood Elves, upped the level cap to 70 and includes the Shaman and Paladin classes.

STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY 2010

SYSTEM: WINDOWS, MAC

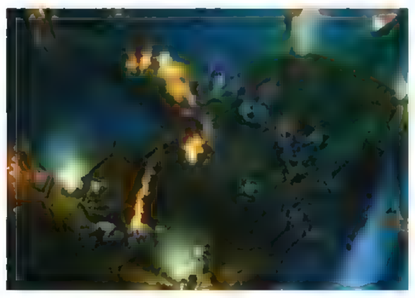
Excitement for Blizzard's sequel was so great that it sold over three million copies in its first month on sale. The excitement was well placed, as *Starcraft II* is arguably one of the best examples of the genre to date. Unlike the original game, the campaign of *Wings Of Liberty* focuses largely on the Terrans and is largely non-linear. It's also packed with variety, constantly challenging what you'd expect from a typical example of the genre and making it fresh and exciting. *Wings Of Liberty* delights in throwing curveballs at you, but also makes you think on your feet thanks to many of the returning units having new skills to master.



HEARTHSTONE: HEROES OF WARCRAFT 2014

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Blizzard's latest game has been a resounding success. Like *Magic: The Gathering* it's a collectible card game, but unlike its digital peer, *Hearthstone* is not trying to gouge you at every possible opportunity. Granted you'll have to start spending a bit of dosh if you want to compete in the big leagues, but it's possible to build up respectable decks without spending. Based on the *Warcraft* universe, *Hearthstone* features 10 characters, each with their own unique spells and abilities, from Warriors to Priests. The addition of these heroes works far better than the similar Planeswalkers of *Magic*, while their large number of unlockable cards ensures you'll be dipping in for more. As well as one-on-one duelling, *Hearthstone* also offers a drafting option called The Arena. You draft a deck of 30 cards by selecting from a choice of three each turn, then take on human opponents until you lose three times.



DIABLO III 2012

SYSTEM: VARIOUS

Despite setting a new record on release for selling 3.5 million units on its first day of sale, things haven't been easy for *Diablo III*. It was beset by internet issues on release due to Blizzard's insistence on it being always online, while its Auction Houses proved so controversial they were eventually shut down earlier this year. Early issues aside, *Diablo III* is quite simply the best game about hitting monsters you're ever likely to play.

HEROES OF THE STORM 2014

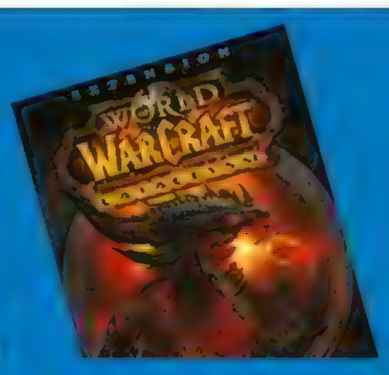
SYSTEM: WINDOWS, MAC

Blizzard's first MOBA, *Heroes Of The Storm* has helped solve one of the genre's biggest problems: accessibility. It eases you in, with easy-to-understand rules and great presentation. It's a free to play game, supported by micropayments, delivering a product full of Blizzard's usual deft touches.

WRATH OF THE LICH KING

FROM: WOW
YEAR: 2008

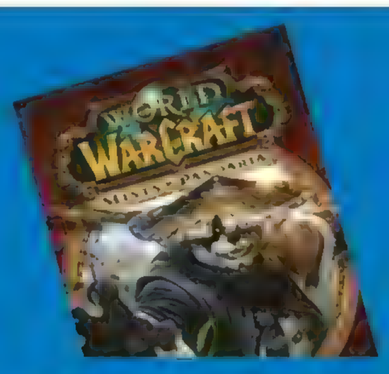
Ooh, your characters can now hit level 80. Other additions include the ability to explore the icy continent of Northrend and a new hero class in the form of the Death Knight.



CATACLYSM

FROM: WOW
YEAR: 2010

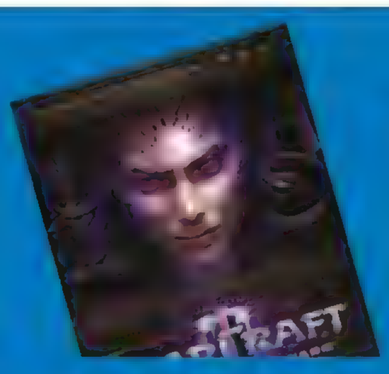
This was the big one as it helped usher in a complete overhaul of *WoW*'s playing systems, from major class changes to a complete overhaul of the talent system. The level cap here hit 85.



MISTS OF PANDARIA

FROM: WOW
YEAR: 2012

This expansion raises the level cap to 90, introduces a new continent, Pandaria. It also adds Pandaren (a group of anthropomorphic Pandas) and the Monk class.



HEART OF THE SWARM

FROM: STARCRAFT II
YEAR: 2013

The first expansion for *Starcraft II* focuses on the terrifying and ruthless Zerg faction. It follows directly on from *Wings Of Liberty* and features a number of new units for each of the races.

REAPER OF SOULS

FROM: DIABLO III
YEAR: 2014

There's a lot of new stuff on offer here. A new class, the Crusader is available, there's a fifth chapter, the level cap is now 70 and Adventure Mode lets you explore every region in the game.

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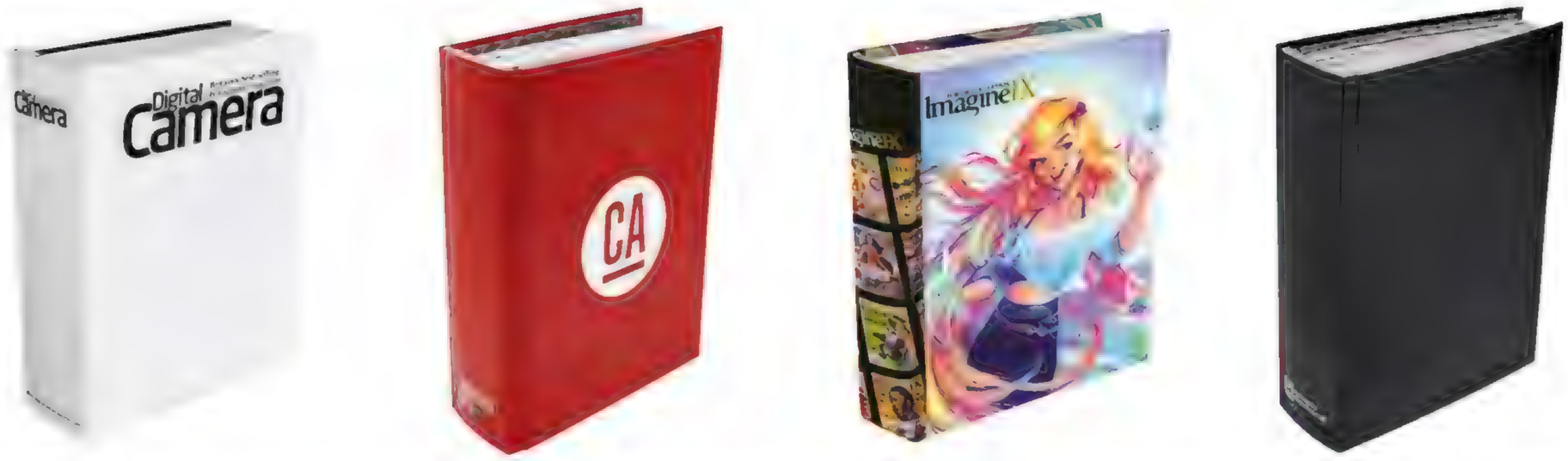

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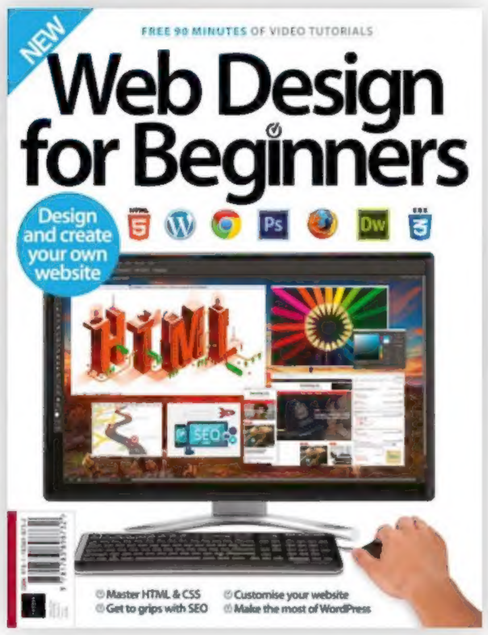

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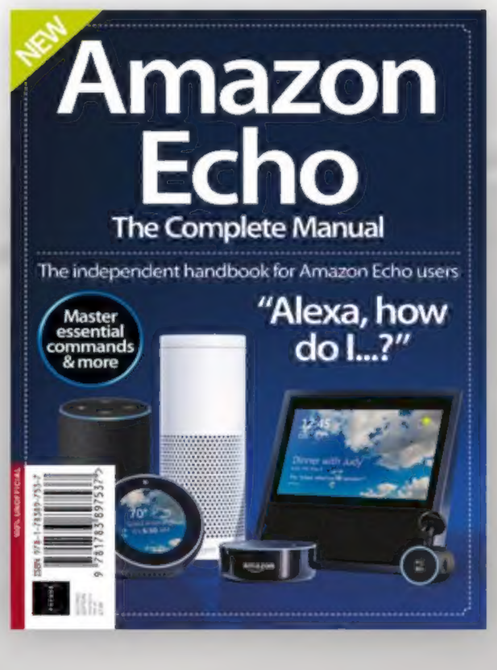

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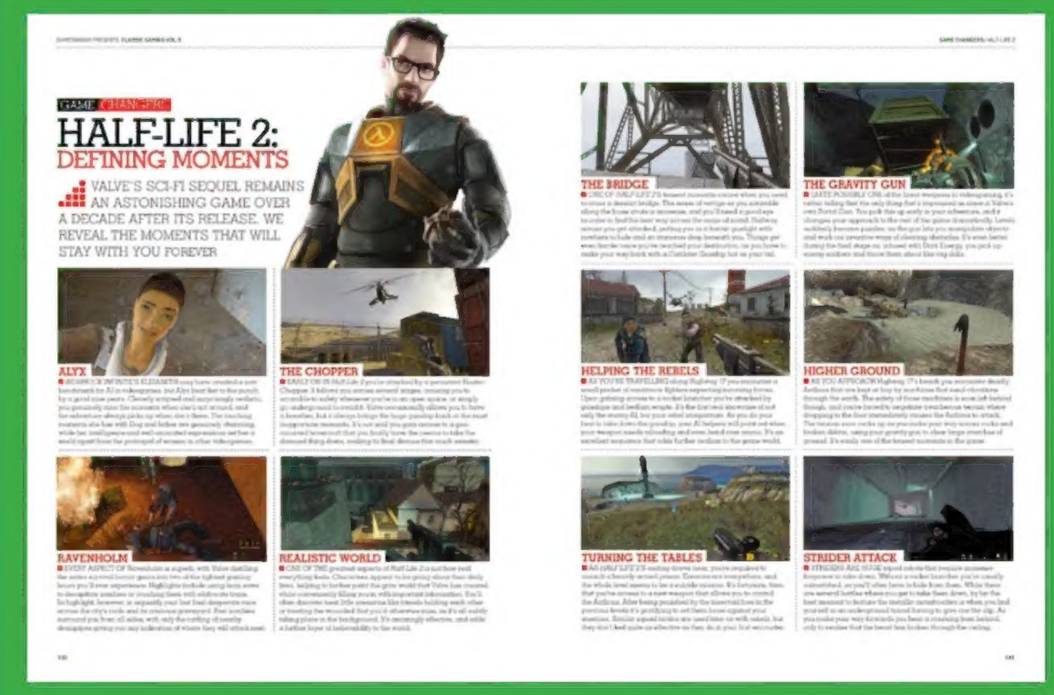

GAME CHANGERS

From *Sonic* to *Metal Gear Solid*, we get nostalgic about some of the best games ever made